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Method and Form in the Novels of Joseph Conrad.

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METHOD AND FORM IN THE NOVELS OF JOSEPH CONRAD

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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ABSTRACT

In the considerable body of criticism written about almost every aspect of the novels of Joseph Conrad, there is a noticeable lack of comment about his technical methods, even though it has been a commonplace of literary history that his techniques were experimental to a greater degree than those of most of his contemporaries. Past criticism has also failed to place his whole approach to method into a clear relationship to any traditions of the English novel, or to find any influences which may have led to his technical experimentation. His work has been grouped loosely with "travel" literature popular at the close of the century, with sea and "Romantic" novelists, or the problem of classification has been avoided by considering him an unexplainable phenomenon, a foreigner writing in a language not his own and with roots in a tradition not native to English. However, if Conrad's reputation as a highly skilled novelist is to be thoroughly understood and his position to be fixed in the history of the novel, it is necessary to face directly the problems of technique and method.

The purpose of this study, then, is twofold: first, to look more closely at Conrad's contemporaries, those writers with whom he associated himself, and discover some evidence about their methods, their self-styled literary impressionism;

second, to analyze Conrad's twelve novels in terms of their style, symbolism, and structure, and arrive at some conclusions about his technique and its place in relation to the stream of the English novel.

Literary impressionism, as it was defined and practiced by Ford Madox Ford, Henry James, Stephen Crane, W. H. Hudson, and Joseph Conrad, was not a deliberately organized literary movement. Rather it was a loosely connected group of views which saw the novel not as a series of external events, but as an attempt to present the reaction of those events upon the actors in them; it placed great importance upon the rendering of experience with the dramatic immediacy with which it strikes the mind; and, perhaps of greatest historical importance, it saw the novel as a conscious art form with unity and coherence organic in its nature.

In style, Conrad varied considerably from the goals of economy and simplicity held by his Impressionist contemporaries. Possibly because of his unusual language background, his prose style is essentially a calculated, "rhetorical" style, a deliberate use of language for its inherent effects, although there is, in his work, a development towards a more functional prose, best illustrated in The Rover (1923). The same calculated quality is evident in the rich symbolism in his novels, particularly in the early Almayer's Folly (1895), and An Outcast of The Islands (1896), although the use of color and atmosphere symbolically in all of his novels is soundly based in impressionism.

It is in his structures that Conrad shows clearly his

debts to impressionism and his influence upon a tradition which underlies the modern novel. Through his experiments with point of view, time shifts, and dramatic projection, he throws the emphasis upon the effect of action rather than upon action itself. Instead of the conventional chronological progression, Conrad employs juxtaposition of scene for irony, association by idea and character instead of time, and meaning through arrangement and focus instead of direct comment--all of which are outgrowths of the Impressionists' view of fictional structure.

It is through this general approach to the form of the novel that Conrad's techniques have had their most far-reaching effect, for much of the technical experimentation of the modern novel is an indirect or direct result of this basically new vision of the richness of meaning possible through form.

INTRODUCTION

The technical approach to the arts has never been a popular one. By asking the question How? we can sometimes miss the very essence of art, but then it is to be wondered if criticism can or should ever really capture this, for there is in all art a secret core which can never be apprehended by mechanical analysis. Such an approach may also slight content, meaning, theme, historical significance, biographical reference, all of which have in the past fallen into the area of critical investigation. But technique is a neglected approach, particularly in the novel, and it is possible that a more vital view of an artist's achievements can come from an attempt to discover his method. Mark Schorer has stated that "modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of achieved content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique."¹ It follows then that if any writer is to be fully understood, historically and esthetically, especially one who is so thoroughly grounded in technical experiment, we must have some knowlege of the way in which he achieved his content.

¹"Technique as Discovery," Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), p. 9.

The reputation of Joseph Conrad among the great novelists of English literature is firmly fixed, although a thorough attempt has not yet been made to evaluate his full significance as an artist; that is, as the artist whom Joseph Warren Beach has called "the most restless and ingenious experimenter of his time, the one who brought the greatest variety of technical procedures to bear upon the problem of the novelist."² There is a multitude of comment on Conrad's biography, his personal psychology, the relevance of his national origins, the autobiographical elements in his novels, his philosophical positions, and almost every other aspect of his art but the highly important one of his methods.

Two very important books have come close in filling this need, both of which have been freely utilized in this study: Ford Madox Ford's Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, and Edward Crankshaw's Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of The Novel. But while these books are valuable, neither makes a full attempt to analyze Conrad's methods formally, or to fix them into a historical perspective. Ford's book is not properly a study of Conrad's techniques at all, as he makes quite clear in the work; it is rather a record of a close personal association with some interesting and valuable asides on the views held toward the form of the novel by Ford and Conrad. Crankshaw has written what should be recognized as one of the most fundamental studies of technique in the novel generally as well as of Conrad specifically, but many of his

²The Twentieth Century Novel (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1932), p. 337.

findings need further elaboration, qualification, and formalized specific illustration; also he is not concerned with a broad view of Conrad's impact upon and origins in a tradition. There are, of course, many minor allusions to Conrad's methods in all of the standard studies of his work, but these too are not expanded into any complete, schematic, and formal study of the ways in which he constructed his art.

Because the study of technique in the novel has not been widely explored, there is a lack of groundwork for a specialized study of an individual novelist; an absence of terminology, procedures, formal disciplines, and models. It is an area in which the critic must build his own foundations as he proceeds and assume that they have a valid relationship to his study. And it is difficult to move through this area without digressing into theme, philosophical content, or other elements which distract from strict technique. This study has sought a solution to this problem by a division into formal technical categories--style, symbolism, and structure--and by concentrating upon generalized definition and direction before exploring these categories in Conrad's novels. Thus before analysis is made, directions and procedures are planned in advance. Terms, classifications, and even conclusions have been borrowed from other commentators and other artistic disciplines when necessary to facilitate the direction of the study. It is probable that some aspects of technique have been neglected in this work. Since the whole problem of technique in the novel is so vaguely defined in past criticism, it has seemed advisable to concentrate

only upon those formal qualities which most clearly are method and not theme. Also it is in these elements, particularly style and structure, that Conrad is most significant as a technical innovator, and his experiments with them mark him as a major force in the direction of contemporary fiction.

It has been traditional, in study of Conrad, to view him as a unique phenomenon: as Albert Guerard, Jr., has said, "He belonged to no particular school."³ To some extent this is so; certainly one major quality which makes a novelist great, with a stature above that of his contemporaries, is his ability to become an individual artist, to give a view of experience which is wholly his own. But at the same time, it is doubtful that any novelist is great enough to create without precedent to direct his methods. Another significant contribution of modern criticism has been to point out the great perpetuating traditions of English literature. Conrad is more than a member of a literary coterie, but he is also solidly grounded in a tradition, a tradition which he did a great deal to create and which has had, in all probability, an effect of vast importance upon the directions of contemporary literature. For this reason, the present study has devoted what may seem an inordinate amount of space to a discussion of Conrad's place in the history of the English novel; the relationships of his methods to those of his contemporaries, the Impressionists; the effect his methods have had upon the contemporary novel; and, in general terms, the

³Joseph Conrad (New York: New Directions, 1947), p. 7.

nature of this tradition as it applies to form in the novel.

Conrad's output was considerable (his complete works fill twenty volumes), and a thorough examination of his techniques as a writer would have to include all of his short stories, short novels, personal reminiscences, and essays, as well as his novels. But because of necessary limitation, the present work is concentrated upon his novels alone. It is his method in the novel which is of central importance and not his whole fictional technique, although there is room for such a study also. Out of his complete works, the present study is concerned with his twelve complete novels which he wrote himself. The three collaborations with Ford Madox Ford--The Inheritors, Romance, and The Nature of a Crime--have been regretfully eliminated, for, although they are very valuable sources for the extent of Ford's influence upon Conrad, the exact contribution of each writer to each novel would present an almost insuperable difficulty; because of this, and the fact that the three novels are in every sense of the word combined efforts, the subject of the collaboration has been discussed in only a general way. Conrad's last novel, Suspense, has also been excluded because the evidence it gives of the future directions of his technique is weakened by the fact that he undoubtedly intended to revise it, and, as it stands, it is only a partially completed work. It may seem that an arbitrary distinction has been drawn between the short novels and long short stories: The Nigger of the "Narcissus" has been included, whereas "Youth," "Heart of Darkness," "The Shadow-Line," and "Typhoon" have

been classified as short stories. This was done partly through precedent and convenience, but mostly because these latter works do not illustrate as well Conrad's experiments with an expanded, full-length form. Quotations, evidence, and illustration have occasionally been drawn from the non-fiction works, but only for purposes of strengthening a point already clear from the twelve novels.

There are, then, two primary goals of this study. The first of these is to examine those contemporaries of Conrad who were the most closely related to him in technical approach for the purposes of abstracting a general body of attitude which has some reference to Conrad's methods. The second is to systemize the formal aspects of Conrad's technique as they appear in his completed novels and fit them into some historical perspective. It should be possible then to formulate some conclusions about his relationship to the stream of the English novel, and, more specifically, his importance to the experimental tradition of the modern novel.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUNDS

1. The revolt

In the dying years of the nineteenth century, in a small area of Sussex and Kent, there was located a group of five writers--only one of whom was a native-born Englishman--making up what H. G. Wells called a "ring of foreign conspirators plotting against British letters."¹ The members of the group lived in a limited area, strategically posed for invasion, near the tip of southeastern England on the Strait of Dover: Henry James at Rye; Stephen Crane at Brede House, near Winchelsea; Joseph Conrad at The Pent, near Hythe; W. H. Hudson at New Romney, one of the Cinque Ports; and Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer) at Winchelsea. The stalwart giants of English letters were strung around the group in a thin line of defense: Kipling at Burwash, H. G. Wells at Sandgate, Thomas Hardy at Dorchester, Sir Alfred Austin (the Poet Laureate) near Burwash. Actually the two forces were not so clearly ranged against each other or necessarily at arms on all points, and the invasion was a slow steady infiltration which had been going on for some time.

The invading writers probably had little idea that

¹Ford Madox Ford, Return to Yesterday (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1931), p. 20.

their goals were similar enough to classify them as a conscious school or specific literary movement. As a general rule, they were individualists, and each worked in his own way to bring about the "revolution," with only personal preferences for each other's company and a shared interest in the methods of writing to bind them together. It was these methods, or techniques, ways of handling narrative prose, that distinguished their writings as a movement. All of them worked and struggled endlessly with the "how" of writing. They worked in close proximity (Ford and Conrad actually collaborated on novels); they met often and talked about the technical aspects of writing; they carefully read each other's works. Above all, they shared an attitude towards "the novel as a work of art, capable of possessing a form, even as sonnets or sonatas possess forms."² They felt that this attitude had not before been held in the some 150 years of the English novel

It advanced, that alien cloud, across the sunlit landscapes of the English nuvvle with its quiet homesteads, cathedral closes, deans, bishops, county families, and hygienically clean milkmaids. And, when it had passed over, forever gone was the simple story that accompanied the Ruling Class young hero from his birth to his bell-haloed union with the pink-frocked daughter of the manor, forever gathering roses in the sunken garden that had been there since the day of Shakespeare. . . . Gone at least forever from the awakened literary consciousness.³

²Ford, Return to Yesterday, p. 208.

³Ford Madox Ford, "Techniques," The Southern Review, I (July, 1935), 26-27. The ellipses are Ford's.

It is perhaps an oversimplification to say that the giants of what Ford called the English "nuvvle" were not conscious of form. Certainly Defoe, Richardson, Sterne experimented with technique and methods. Sterne's artful digressions were impressionistic, at least superficially, and his stream of consciousness bears some likenesses to the modern device. The psychological penetration of Richardson was in the same very general direction as that of James over a hundred years later, and the use of journals and a pseudo-real narrator in Moll Flanders is a device employed by Conrad, Ford, and many moderns. F. R. Leavis includes, of the Victorian novelists, Jane Austen and George Eliot in his The Great Tradition, saying that "the great novelists in that tradition are all very much concerned with 'form'; they are all very original technically, having turned their genius to the working out of their own appropriate methods and procedures."⁴ But, in general, previous to the emergence of the "foreign conspirators," the novel had been thought of as important in terms of its content, as simply a story--if good, one with interesting characters and exciting action; the novelist either had the talent to capture these things or he lacked it and missed them.

The belief that the Impressionists, as Ford styled them,⁵ introduced a new direction in technique into the English novel is not universally accepted by literary historians. In an

⁴(New York: George W. Stewart, Inc., n.d.), p. 7.

⁵"Techniques," p. 20.

article reviewing form and technique in the Victorian novel, Bradford A. Booth says that Henry James, and by implication his Impressionist contemporaries, added little technically to the English novel of the great Victorians: "Actually, the Victorian novel encompasses most of the techniques--from that of Samuel Richardson to that of Dorothy Richardson." What occurred with James was instead a "subtilization of technique and form with no marked intensification of over-all merit."⁶ The most immediate answer which suggests itself here is that the ways of prose narrative are infinite and varied; the Impressionists and their French teachers laid no claim to absolute innovation in technique, but to the idea that technique was directly and qualitatively related to content and all important in creating the final meaning. "The well made book is the book in which the subject and the form coincide . . . in which the form expresses all the matter."⁷

Professor Booth's discussion of techniques employed by the Victorians is so well indicative of a common position that it deserves extended treatment. Dickens is praised for his technical skill, particularly for his use of the dramatic method,⁸ for rendering directly instead of summarizing, as the Impressionists would have phrased the device. As Booth

⁶"Form and Technique in the Novel," The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature, ed. Joseph E. Baker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 67-8.

⁷Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), p. 40.

⁸Booth, p. 77.

admits, this is only one aspect of Dickens' method; he did not use the dramatic method of presenting action exclusively, only in selected passages, and it was not characteristic of his method in the novel. This is not to damn him as a novelist, for his reputation is well established, and deservedly so, but to suggest that what was just an occasional device to Dickens was a constant objective to the Impressionists. In speaking of Dickens' faults in structure, Booth says that "virtually all his defects can be traced to the vicious influence of serial publication," which resulted in "the substitution of a series of minor effects for one major cumulative effect."⁹ Public taste, operating through serialization in periodicals, affected also the novelists of the 'nineties; that is, it attempted to force on them too the minor climax to each chapter which would keep the plot fresh in the reader's mind until next week or next month. And "it was against the tyranny of this convention that Conrad was revolting when so passionately he sought for the New Form."¹⁰ Dickens and Thackeray worked within requirements of serialization and in consequence their novels are frequently loose, episodic in construction, with little central effect; they lack, to use Percy Lubbock's term, a "centre of vision." Many of the works of Conrad, James, and Ford were serialized; yet one characteristic of

⁹Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰Ford, Return to Yesterday, p. 209.

all of their novels is the striving--not always successful--for a unified effect. Of course, the later writers faced a different public and, to some extent, had the advantage of readers whose tastes had been tempered by much literary experimentation. But, at the same time, the "punch line" serial did still exist in the 'nineties, and it is to the credit of the Impressionists that they were able to maintain their concept of form despite the demands of public taste.

About Thackeray, Booth says that his "interests were primarily those of the story teller, he gave little heed to conventional narrative technique."¹¹ Although there might be a legitimate question as to how any effective "story teller" can ignore narrative techniques, it cannot be doubted that the source of Thackeray's power is rarely his form. Ford Madox Ford's comments on Vanity Fair illustrate the later novelist's view of the Victorian's formlessness. Ford praises the great "phantasmagoria of realities" Thackeray created in the novel in the eve of Waterloo scenes, and then destroyed completely: "And that disillusionment was occasioned by Mr. Thackeray, broken nose and all, thrusting his moral reflections upon you, in the desperate determination to impress you with the conviction that he was a proper man to be a member of the Athenaeum Club."¹²

Admitting that he was faulty in technique and that he was

¹¹Booth, p. 79.

¹²"Techniques," p. 23.

occasionally "derelict in his duties to truth," Booth praises Thackeray for his trenchant observations on men and his prose style.¹³ Although Thackeray certainly possessed these qualities, they are not in themselves necessarily virtues of the novel; they might apply just as well to Bacon's Essays. It would be difficult to assert that Thackeray ever viewed the novel as a distinct form, even though he has his great value as a satirist, portraitist, and stylist. He rarely projected his material directly, he used much exposition and summary, and he often committed what was to the Impressionists the greatest of technical sins: direct author intrusion and comment. Author effacement was a basic tenet of impressionism: ". . . the object of the novelist is to keep the reader entirely oblivious to the fact that the author exists--even of the fact that he is reading a book."¹⁴ Both Thackeray and Dickens were the masters of prose narrative in the early and mid-Victorian period, but their most distinctive qualities as novelists were just those excesses which the Impressionists were rebelling against.

Among the other Victorians, Booth praises Trollope as a portraitist of contemporary life, Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell, and Kingsley as social critics, and the Brontes for their "poetry plus passion."¹⁵ Meredith is seen as a transition figure who can write a novel like The Egoist, which "might

¹³Booth, p. 80.

¹⁴Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (London: Duckworth & Co., 1924), p. 186.

¹⁵Booth, p. 88.

easily be mistaken for late Henry James"; yet he "follows no plan, no rules," and "was not particularly interested in form."¹⁶ Granted that Meredith poses complexities of structure, it is doubtful that a novelist could compose the carefully structured Jamesian novel and disregard form and plan. James and Meredith may have shared a common interest in the French writers, but Meredith was not aware of a crusade for a New Form; at least he did not produce any novels or a significant body of criticism--such as James' prefaces and Ford's book on Conrad--which would indicate that he was.

Whether or not there were any actually new techniques introduced into the English novel by the Impressionists is an involved and not particularly fruitful question, but there can be little doubt that there is a considerable difference in the concept of form between the novels of the great Victorians and those of the Jamesian Impressionists. Possibly an error of contemporary criticism has been to assert that the modern novel is an end result of a progression, that the great novels of the past were merely steps towards the perfection of form in the contemporary novel. If so, such is an error of much literary criticism of the past as well--judging the literature of the past by the needs of the present. The contemporary critic is faced with a complex literary form; it is his responsibility to reach some conclusions

¹⁶Ibid., p. 90.

about the nature of form in the modern novel, and he can do so only by recognizing that there have been great changes in the writer's approach to his material.

Crane, Conrad, James, and Ford's immediate contemporaries, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy, have also well established reputations in the history of the English novel, or what can be thought of as the traditional English novel. Although all of them--and without too much distortion can be added Hardy, Kipling, George Moore--were in their own way masters of prose fiction, they were not sympathetic, generally, with the objectives of the Impressionists and, as a result, remained outside the movement.

H. G. Wells, a personal friend of all of the Impressionists, expresses what is possibly a common opinion of the "vivid writers" in a revealing anecdote in his autobiography.¹⁷ He and Conrad were sitting on Sandgate beach watching a boat out on the water. Conrad, whose mind was rarely far from writing, asked Wells how he would describe the way the boat sat on the water. Wells was surprised by the question and replied that if he considered the problem at all the boat would be just a boat, unless it had some specific reference to his theme or plot. Conrad naturally felt that the boat should be rendered as a distinct and separate boat, like no other in existence; the writer was obligated to find those

¹⁷H. G. Wells, Experiment in Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 528.

qualities which gave the boat its uniqueness. For all of his great value as a social and political historian, Wells was not interested in intensity of effect, style, or structure. He felt himself apart from those whose interest was "craftsmanship . . . mystically intensified and passionately pursued."¹⁸ In defense, he styled himself a journalist who was interested in ideas. It is certain that James, Crane, Conrad, and Ford would have denied that, to the novelist, ideas and form can be properly separated. The writer's art was to be approached from the viewpoint of his methods, his style, his structure, and these were almost inseparable from his material because "for every subject there is only one best treatment."¹⁹

Virginia Woolf, her own work an excellent example of trends set up by the Impressionists, suggests in an important essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in greater detail the break between Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy and the new concept of the novel.²⁰ Her remarks apply to the "Georgians"--D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and E. M. Forster--and she makes no mention of the Impressionists; but the Georgians were securely fixed in the trends inaugurated by Conrad, Crane, James, and Ford, and Mrs. Woolf's elucidation is equally applicable to the later writers. In the beginning years of this century, says Mrs. Woolf, there were few novelists who

¹⁸Ibid., p. 534.

¹⁹Ford, Return to Yesterday, p. 187.

²⁰The Captain's Death Bed and other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), pp. 94-119.

had anything real or unusual to offer, who brought to us a vital, human view. The Edwardians--Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy--were writing novels which, however necessary, were incomplete, lacking in essential reality. "Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them, actively and practically, for himself."²¹ Each skirted the fringe of reality: Wells with his social schemes, Bennett with minute pictures of the times, and Galsworthy with ideas of social justice. They "were never interested in character in itself; in the book in itself. They were interested in something outside."²² They told the reader what to feel, in the tradition of the eighteenth century and the Victorians; they tried to make the reader imagine for them.

In order to remedy this vagueness Mrs. Woolf felt it was necessary for her, as a writer, to "go back and back and back; to experiment with one thing and another; to try this sentence and that, referring each word to my vision, matching it as exactly as possible, and knowing that somehow I had to find a common ground between us."²³ This common ground can be reached only by suggestion and implication; by finding those intimate and close details of character which give the full essence of character, not by elaborating background

²¹Ibid., p. 105.

²²Loc. cit.

²³Ibid., p. 112.

or by using character as a vehicle for philosophic idea. This too was the sentiment of the Impressionists. They wished to break away from the expository novel, and all of the writers in the group were at the center interested in human character. The novels of James, Conrad, Ford, and Crane are certainly rich with complex meaning, but none of them--with the possible exception of Crane's naturalistic Maggie--is a thesis novel, a framework for social or political ideas. There is without doubt much of great value in Bennett or Galsworthy's detailed picture of a peculiar class of English society, or in Wells' political foresight, but the value is more temporal than universal; the intentions were closely related to contemporary conditions. As Walter Allen says about Trollope, Wells, and Bennett, "They belong to an age which is past and write out of assumptions about the nature of society and men no longer current or readily acceptable except by the deliberate exercise of the historical imagination all fiction of the past, apart from the greatest, compels us to make."²⁴ These novelists were in the tradition which Henry James typified as the "immersion" school: the slice of life which, in reality, shows nothing but the loaf.²⁵ It was a tradition which continued in gathering intensity up to the modern naturalistic novel and the social criticism

²⁴The English Novel (London: Phoenix House, Ltd., 1954), p. 296.

²⁵"The New Novel," Notes on Novelists (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 342.

of the 'thirties, but it was not the well-made novel of the Impressionists.

2. The Impressionists

The Impressionists formed, then, a loosely-knit group which consciously broke with conventional attitudes towards the way in which a novel should be written. Although they agreed on a basic body of theory, probably derived ultimately from the French, each worked from this theory and added to it in his own individual way. There are a great many differences among these five writers; their subjects range through the American Civil War, the British Merchant Marine, selected English and Continental social circles, South American pampas, and World War I. And, it bears repeating, they were not a consciously organized literary movement in the same sense as were the American realists Howells, and Garland, and their followers. But the Impressionists' ways of handling their subjects grew from a general agreement upon essentials; their specific ways of viewing technique were close enough to justify calling them a movement.²⁶

²⁶The following table is meant merely to indicate the chronological relationship of the chief works of the Impressionist group in the years 1895-1903.

1895	<u>Almayer's Folly</u> , Conrad. <u>British Birds</u> , Hudson. <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u> , Crane. <u>The Black Riders and Other Lines</u> , Crane.
1896	<u>An Outcast of The Islands</u> , Conrad. <u>Ford Madox Brown</u> , Ford. <u>George's Mother</u> , Crane.
1897	<u>The Nigger of the "Narcissus"</u> , Conrad. <u>What Maisie Knew</u> , Crane. <u>The Spoils of Poynton</u> , James. <u>The Third Violet</u> , Crane.
1898	<u>Tales of Unrest</u> , Conrad. <u>The Turn of The Screw</u> , James. <u>The Open Boat</u> , Crane. Beginning of Ford and Conrad's collaboration.

It seems strange to find included among those five who "lit a beacon that posterity shall not easily let die"²⁷ the name of W. H. Hudson. Although Green Mansions and The Purple Land have been traditionally popular romantic novels, Hudson is comparatively unknown as a serious influence in modern fiction. The neglect is difficult to understand in view of both Ford and Conrad's extravagant praise of this "unapproached master of the English tongue."²⁸ Again and again Ford refers to the admiration he and Conrad felt for the naturalist. In a letter to Cunningham Graham, Conrad says that Hudson writes "as if some very fine, very gentle spirit were whispering to him the sentences he puts down on the paper."²⁹ Since Hudson was not, in an exclusive sense of the word, a novelist--he preferred to think of himself as not a writer but a naturalist--the reason for his reputation among the Impressionists was style rather than fictional technique.

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- 1899 The Awkward Age, James. The Monster and Other Stories, Crane.
 1900 Lord Jim, Conrad. The Cinque Ports, Poems for Pictures, Ford.
 1901 The Inheritors, Ford and Conrad. The Sacred Fount, James.
 1902 "Typhoon," "Youth," Conrad. The Wings of The Dove, James. Rossetti, Ford.
 1903 Romance, Ford and Conrad. The Ambassadors, James.

²⁷Ford, Return to Yesterday, p. 21.

²⁸Ford Madox Hueffer /Ford/, Thus to Revisit (London: Chapman & Hall, 1921), p. 69.

²⁹G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1927), II, 129-30.

The largest part of Hudson's writing is a naturalist's detailed observation of animal life and the countryside in which it lives. Although not his best known work, in such books as Hampshire Days, Shepherd's Life, Birds in a Village, Nature in Downland he records with intimate detail the life around him in a remarkably clear, vivid style, a style so natural Conrad remarked that, "He writes as the grass grows."³⁰ It is the precision and economy of Hudson's writing which distinguishes it from so much of the heavy Latinisms and elaborate rhetorical figures of the prose of his traditionalist contemporaries. He is at his best in the nature books, when he was not concerned with any complex psychological analysis, but only a clear rendering of his observation. An example of his description illustrates this straightforward clarity.

The river was but thirty to forty feet wide at that spot, with masses of water forget-me-nots growing on the opposite bank, clearly reflected in the sherry-coloured sunlit current below. The trees were mostly oaks, in the young vivid green of early June foliage. And one day when the sky, seen through that fresh foliage, was without a stain of vapour in its pure azure, when the wood was full of clear sunlight--so clear that silken spider webs, thirty or forty feet high in the oaks, were visible as shining red and blue and purple lines--the bird, after drumming high above my head, flew to an oak tree just before me, and clinging vertically to the bark on the high part of the trunk remained there motionless for some time.

Hudson's description of the bird is an excellent example of the blending of sensory impressions, each distinct, into

³⁰Ford, Thus to Revisit, p. 70.

a single image:

His statuesque attitude, as he sat with his head thrown well back, the light glinting on his hard polished feathers, black and white and crimson, the setting in which he appeared of greenest translucent leaves and hoary bark and open sunlit space, all together made him seem not only our handsomest wood-pecker, but our most beautiful bird. I had seen him at his best, and sitting there motionless amid the wind-fluttered leaves, he was like a bird-figure carved from some beautiful vari-coloured stone.³¹

The force of this descriptive passage comes not from a mass of detail, overwhelming the reader by pure rhetoric (as is often true in "traditional" English prose style), but from the selection of sharp, specific detail. Although Hudson may have labored to achieve this effect, the most remarkable quality of the style is its simplicity and emphasis upon the object being described. The prose of Green Mansions and The Purple Land is at times like that of the early Conrad, but much of Hudson's best writing is pared down to simplicity. Each image is sharply etched, then left alone, not fattened into lushness. "Hudson gets his effects by an almost infinite and meticulous toning down of language."³² The adjectives are selected so as to avoid any of the triteness so common in natural description. Hudson does this not by choosing unusual descriptive words, but by joining common

³¹Hampshire Days (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), pp. 12-13. Although this is a selected passage it is not isolated. Hudson's writing is unusually consistent in its stylistic characteristics; almost any passage chosen at random would do as well.

Hudson's artistic achievements are discussed in some detail in Richard E. Haymaker, From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs (New York: Bookman Associates, 1954), pp. 139-68.

³²Ford, "Techniques," p. 29.

ones in striking combinations (a favorite device of the Impressionists): "sherry-coloured," "hard polished feathers," "wind-fluttered leaves." Also colors or other perceptions in a series are separated by conjunctions instead of commas ("red and blue and purple"); the result is an emphasis upon each, a series of surprises.

It is interesting to contrast the above passage with some of the unusually rich purple passages in Conrad's early novels and the "Chinese boxes" of James' later works, remembering, of course, that the intentions of the three writers are entirely different. Conrad and James are most often concerned with motivations and actions, complex emotions and relationships. Comparatively Hudson's task is easier: the stuff of his experience is more readily available; the river, the sky, the birds, are there for him to see physically, things he is intimately acquainted with, and are not, technically speaking, particularly complex. He has only to materialize what is already there. This is not to say that the result is a mechanical objective process because this is Hudson's peculiar view of what is there, but he is not faced, like Conrad, James, Ford, and Crane, with creating wholly from his imagination a many-faceted world, visually, emotionally, and intellectually. Hudson lived in a quiet world of which he was an inseparable part, and because he was so thoroughly attuned with this world he could present it so beautifully and clearly--but it was not a world wholly of the imagination.

It would be difficult to posit, at this point, any direct influence of Hudson upon modern fiction and, beyond style, on impressionism. Certainly the beautifully disciplined observer of nature is not common in the modern novel, and Hudson's novels are not necessarily experimental. Hudson's style is in the direct stream from that of Flaubert's, the use of language to describe experience exactly, economically, and through suggestion; this view of language was essential to the theory of impressionism and to a great deal of modern fiction.

In one of his literary memoirs, Ford reports a conversation with Stephen Crane which exemplifies the search for purity and precision which Hudson so well illustrates. Crane quotes, with scorn, a line from Stevenson: "With interjected finger he delayed the action of the timepiece." What was meant, says Crane, is "He put the clock back"; such elaborate circumlocutions have set English prose back a hundred years.³³ This may be an over-simplification, but at the same time it is a sentiment which mirrors accurately some of the changes in English prose style brought about--in a large measure--by the influence of Flaubert, Maupassant, and the Impressionists. The traditional Latinisms of Dr. Johnson, the Ciceronian balances and gorgeous color of Sir Thomas Browne and his disciples Pater and Stevenson, were all refined to the clean, precise, and clear economy of Hudson, which is exactly why

³³Thus to Revisit, p. 75.

the naturalist was so admired by the other Impressionists. As Virginia Woolf has suggested, the prose style of the great English novel from Defoe to Richardson, Smollett to Trollope, Thackeray, and Dickens was primarily expository; the reader was told what to feel or led carefully to the expected reaction. The Impressionists, from the French, wanted not to tell but to show, to render, so that the effect was inevitable but not explained by sign posts.

An excellent modern example of just this trend in style is found in the novels of Ernest Hemingway, who--although he would probably deny it--has many sympathies with Hudson's straightforward view of nature as well as his prose style. The ideal of economy which Hemingway describes is much the same as that of Hudson.

No matter how good a phrase or a simile he the writer may have if he puts it where it is not absolutely necessary and irreplaceable he is spoiling his work for egotism. Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.

Hemingway's style is simple, based on simple and compound sentence rhythms and studded with concrete words which are really just a series of direct perceptions. He describes the lessons he learned early and never forgot.

I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced.³⁴

³⁴Ernest Hemingway, Death in The Afternoon (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), pp. 191, 2, resp.

His style, then, was an attempt to render, the device stressed so much by the earlier novelists. This ideal is not always realized the same way in the intricate shadings and rhythms of James and Conrad, but the objective was still to place the reader in direct contact with the experience.

Stephen Crane's somewhat ambivalent reputation in American fiction has only recently been securely established by literary historians, although a great deal of evaluation and explication remains to be written. Of all of the members of the group he is most clearly and with cause labeled as an impressionist; as a matter of fact, "He is," as Conrad wrote in 1897, "the only impressionist and only an impressionist."³⁵

The comparatively small body of Crane's work is shot through by one of the most original and startling prose styles in modern fiction. Crane's precocious writing career (1893-1900) was during the great realistic upheavals in American fiction caused by William Dean Howells, Hamlin Garland, and their followers, and he contributed--or even began--the tide of naturalism with Maggie; however, his most effective writing is outside the strict limits of both realism, or "veritism," and naturalism. He did aim at a photographic representation of life, but he did so with much more selectivity than is usually associated with the "mirror

³⁵Jean-Aubry, I, 211.

dawdling down the lane" school of realists, and his emphasis upon stylistic and symbolic effects and absence of reiterated thesis separate him from the stream of naturalism. It is his "admirable bare prose"³⁶ which most marks him as an innovator in fictional technique.

Analyzing the texture of Crane's prose fully is a study too detailed for present purposes, but there are in his style certain qualities which are important in relation to the impressionist movement and Conrad's development. One of these is Crane's use of color as precise symbol, for subtle shadings of atmosphere, and for the reality of his impressionistic view. Robert Wooster Stallman has shown some of the intricate symbolic color patterns in The Red Badge of Courage, which has an elaborate system of color relationships "with the symbolic value of any given color varying according to its location in a specific context": cleared atmospheres are usually symbolic of spiritual insight or revelation, dark mists "the haze of Henry's unenlightened mind."³⁷ An example of both values in operation is the last line of the novel, after Henry's revelation is complete: "Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds."³⁸ The most

³⁶Wells, Experiment in Autobiography, p. 522.

³⁷"Stephen Crane: A Revaluation," Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, ed. John W. Aldrich (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1952), pp. 260, 254.

³⁸The Red Badge of Courage (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), p. 267. Future page references to the novel are to this edition.

famous line in the novel, "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (p. 114), is, as Stallman finds, essential to the religious symbolism, functioning partially through color, which permeates the novel.³⁹ On the opening pages of the novel, the "red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp fires" (repeated with variations throughout the novel), is richly suggestive of the smouldering passions of battle. Other color symbols and contrasts indicate that Crane manipulated his style quite intentionally for this purpose.

At several places in The Red Badge of Courage Crane selects carefully balanced color combinations, usually contrasted, for the purpose of catching an exact mood--very much as did Conrad--through the rich connotation of colors used.

When another night came the columns, changed to purple streaks, filed across two pontoon bridges. A glaring fire wine-tinted the waters of the river. Its rays, shining upon the moving masses of troops, brought forth here and there sudden gleams of silver and gold. Upon the other shore a dark and mysterious range of hills was curved against the sky. The insect voices of the night sang solemnly (p. 37).

Crane employs striking combinations of sense impressions, with the same vivid effect that Hudson frequently achieved: "fairy blue" (p. 28), "liquid stillness of the night" (p. 31), "red, shivering reflection of a fire" (p. 36), "the passionate song of the bullets" (p. 58), "a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones" (pp. 65-6).

³⁹Stallman, p. 268.

In each case the actual words composing the image are not strained or ponderous; the effect is obtained by combining simple, common words into sharp, distinct impressions.

Crane's images are often vibrant with movement or suppressed passion, bringing realism to an almost painful vividness: "Camp fires, like red, peculiar blossoms, dotted the night" (p. 31); "The rushing yellow of the developing day went on behind their backs" (p. 27); ". . . the flesh over his heart seemed very thin" (p. 41); ". . . the side looked as if it had been chewed by wolves" (p. 115).

James Colvert, in a study of Crane's esthetic development, mentions a characteristic telescoping of many of Crane's images. The figure is pared down to a highly condensed but suggestive metaphor.⁴⁰ Examples of this device are plentiful in The Red Badge of Courage. Early in the novel, Henry recalls his visions of "broken-bladed glory" (p. 16), a description which manages to suggest ironically the shining swords and heroism of romantic warfare without the explicit simile. The gleaming campfires mentioned previously are shortened later in the book to "red eyes across the river" (p. 25); and the numerous examples of personification, or "animism," in which Crane embodies armies and inanimate nature with life and color, are also intensifying figures.

In general the construction of Crane's sentences is more like the clipped, staccato prose of Hemingway than the

⁴⁰"The Literary Development of Stephen Crane," unpubl. diss. (Louisiana State University, 1953), p. 272.

involved syntax of James or the carefully cadenced rhetoric of Conrad. One of the few very clear tenets of his esthetic was the need for economy in style, and he cut away complex sentence patterns as well as elaborate vocabulary. The result was often a nervous, jerky sentence movement, although some of his short stories indicate that his prose could be highly flexible. No one of the Impressionists went so far in the direction of economy and suggestion through sensory images and simplicity as did Crane, and his style makes an interesting illustration of some of the ideals of impressionism carried to achievement.

Crane critics in general agree that his methods are almost unique. The traditional attribution of his peculiar techniques to the French naturalists has been refuted.⁴¹ He stated himself that he ascribed to the realistic doctrines of Howells and Garland, but his debt was closer in theory than in practice. He died before James' late novels and Conrad's full maturity, but he read both novelists with eagerness and no doubt with profit.

The most reasonable suggestion of his sources has been the influence of the great French impressionist painters, a source of great importance to all of literary impressionism. As early as 1900, H. G. Wells said, in an essay on Crane, that "the great influence of the studio on Crane cannot be ignored."⁴²

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 86-102 passim.

⁴²"Stephen Crane from an English Standpoint," The Shock of Recognition, ed. Edmund Wilson (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1947), p. 662. The essay originally appeared in The North American Review, CLXXI (August, 1900), 233-42.

In the most recent full-length study of Crane, John Berryman denies any significant influence from the painters;⁴³ however, both Stallman⁴⁴ and Colvert⁴⁵ develop several parallels convincingly. Stallman points out that Crane's apparently disconnected images are much like the blobs of color used by the painters, which when viewed from a special distance produced a single effect.⁴⁶ Often Crane sets brilliant colors against a smoky, blurred background for contrast, as did the painters: in The Red Badge of Courage, "the mist of smoke gashed by the little knives of fire" (p. 251). His use of a fixed point of vision, nearly always from Henry Fleming's mind in this novel, is paralleled by the perspectives of the painters. And the general attempt of the painters to catch the psychological, sensory effect of experience was shared by Crane.

"Irony is Crane's chief technical instrument,"⁴⁷ and, it might be added, the major force of much of James, Conrad, and Ford's novels. Every completed work of Crane's is informed and based upon contrast, paradox, often bitter irony, so much so that he is still often charged with being brutal and cynical. But irony was part of his vision, and

⁴³Stephen Crane, The American Men of Letters Series (New York: William Sloane, 1950), p. 228.

⁴⁴"Stephen Crane: A Revaluation," pp. 251-69.

⁴⁵"The Literary Development of . . ." pp. 86-102.

⁴⁶Stallman, p. 252.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 245.

without doubt a part of the bitterness in the atmosphere at the close of the century.

Stephen Crane's most direct effect upon the English novel was probably upon the American naturalists of the 'twenties and 'thirties, Dreiser, James T. Farrell, Dos Passos, and the Hemingway-inspired novel of violence which seems to be the present day manifestation of naturalism--all of which is, of course, a considerable distance from the well-made novel of the Impressionists. However, Crane's style, his complex use of symbolism and atmosphere, were in quite a different tradition, the tradition within which Conrad, James, and Ford were working. "Like Conrad, Crane puts language to poetic uses, which, to define it, is to use language reflexively and to use language symbolically."⁴⁸

It is somewhat disproportionate to allow the smallest amount of space to the novelist who was probably the most significant member of the group, Henry James, but the fact remains that he is difficult to categorize, and it is even a disservice to force him into a niche. A dominant impression which comes from reading his prefaces, "a fairly exhaustive reference book on the technical aspects of the art of fiction,"⁴⁹ is that he was not interested in establishing broad general theories for his contemporaries to follow; instead he centered on the problems peculiar to each of his novels and

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 269.

⁴⁹Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. viii.

the ways in which he worked those problems out. In general, his own techniques, particularly in his later novels, were wholly within the intentions of impressionism, but James himself did not flaunt the banner as did Ford, Conrad, and Crane. He does not very often mention his contemporary American or English writers and reserves his praise for the Europeans, particularly Turgenev. The complexities of his sensibility were entirely too individual for easy classification, but, as has been said earlier, the Impressionists were by no means imitators of each other.

To the other Impressionists, who claimed him as one of them, James was the Master who was "performing the miracles after whose secrets we were merely groping."⁵⁰ Conrad admired him greatly, addressing him as Mon cher Maître, but with some reservations for his later novels and his too-perfect technique.⁵¹ In his book on James, Ford describes him as "the greatest of living writers and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men."⁵² The

⁵⁰Ford, Return to Yesterday, p. 210

⁵¹Jean-Aubry, I, 270-1. "Technical perfection, unless there is some real glow to illumine and warm it from within, must necessarily be cold. I argue that in H. J. there is such a glow and not a dim one either, but to us used, absolutely accustomed, to unartistic expression of fine, headlong, honest (or dishonest) sentiments the art of H. J. does appear heartless." (From a letter to John Galsworthy.)

Ford reports (Return to Yesterday, p. 24) that James' view of Conrad's novels was not wholly favorable: ". . . Conrad's works impressed him very disagreeably, but he could find no technical fault or awkwardness about them." For a contrary opinion, see James' Notes on Novelists, pp. 345-51.

⁵²Ford Madox Hueffer [Ford], Henry James (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1916), p. 9.

judgment is interesting in view of the fact that James apparently considered Ford "le jeune homme modeste," and in their fairly frequent associations only rarely spoke of writing. In one of their collaborations, The Inheritors, Ford and Conrad modelled a character, the novelist Callan, on James and did so in none too flattering terms.⁵³

Possibly it is only a coincidence that James should put Ford, as Densher, into The Wings of The Dove at the same time. Ford reports that James felt a great respect for Crane, "My young compatriot of genius," but was shocked by his social eccentricities.⁵⁴ The very fact that James tolerated Crane's unconventional escapades indicated a deep appreciation for his talents. Even though his natural restraint may have kept him from being involved too much personally in a "movement," James was on fairly close personal terms with all of the Impressionists.

Another important factor which must be considered in gauging James' relationships with the Impressionists is chronology. His first novel of importance, Roderick Hudson, was published in 1875, considerably earlier than the works of the other novelists, and his later, more characteristic, novels were published between 1902-1904, before either Conrad or Ford had written the last half of their work. Thus his body of fiction and much of the technical experimentation

⁵³Elliot Bickley Gose, "Passion and Tradition: A Critical Appraisal of Ford Madox Ford," unpubl. diss. (Cornell University, 1954), p. 17.

⁵⁴Return to Yesterday, p. 30.

in it were available as a precedent for the later novelists. Crane, of course, was earlier, and Hudson was in a different technical sphere from that of James, so that the force of James' influence fell most directly on Ford and Conrad. The specific extent of this influence is a subject too extended for this study, but that it existed is quite evident in Ford's and Conrad's statements outside their novels as well as in their writing.

Because James explored so many aspects of technique it is necessary to speak of his impressionist qualities only generally. According to Ford, "The supreme function of Impressionism is selection," and Henry James "carried the power of selection so far that he can create an impression with nothing at all."⁵⁵ Selection was of primary importance to impressionism because the writer chose from life those impressions which he felt were significant. In order to communicate an impression to a reader the writer must be indirect, since the material of impressions is not by nature intellectual but sensory. James' later novels function constantly through indirection. One of his difficulties, to some readers, is that he leaves so much to suggestion and implication. James, like some of the other Impressionists, presents his material from within his characters; he concerns himself with psychological patterns, impressions, the effect of action upon people rather than the action itself.

⁵⁵Henry James, p. 152.

The typical Jamesian novel is "well-made," a progression d'effet in which everything is calculated to fit the final effect. To achieve this form, he experimented constantly, especially with viewpoint or post of observation, and the gradual unfolding of events. Experimentation was a key motivation in the impressionist movement. James' subjects were quite different from those of Conrad, Crane, and Ford. He felt that the more limited and narrow his world, physically speaking, the more deeply he could penetrate its truth; the masculine, "colorful" quality of Crane and Conrad, the sea and vivid action, is not found in James' novels. And neither is the emotional intensity of Conrad characteristic of James, because the latter often veiled his intense emotion to sharpen its indirection.

The basic dichotomy between James and Conrad and Ford is revealed in one of Ford's comments upon James. Although the Master was regarded by Ford and Conrad as a supreme technician, they had reservations about his talent: "For, in the end, Conrad and I found salvation not in any machined Form, but in the sheer attempt to reproduce in words life as it presents itself to the intelligent observer."⁵⁶ James' obsession with the perfection of form ignored some of the richness of life. Conrad frequently presents the event in full vividness as well as reactions to the event; whereas James wanted only the latter. Conrad and Ford have many Jamesian situations in their novels, but neither wrote the

⁵⁶Return to Yesterday, p. 210.

true Jamesian novel. Although the Master was an Impressionist in his emphasis upon style--the importance of language in molding the material of the novel--his habit of muffling with "heavy circumlocutions"⁵⁷ is quite different from the vibrant color of Crane or Conrad. Henry James was perhaps the real giant of literary impressionism and the creator of the carefully structured and focused novel, but his followers departed from him at several crucial points.

Faced with the task of evaluating Ford Madox Ford's position in the group of Impressionists, one is tempted to accept the unfortunate obscurity he has fallen into since his death in 1939, not by any means because the obscurity is deserved, but because his position as a novelist and critic is so difficult to evaluate. During his highly productive life, he wrote twenty-five volumes of non-fiction, including five books of memoirs and remembrances, five of literary criticism, and nine studies of cultures; he also published eleven volumes of poetry and twenty-seven novels (not including four collaborations and four volumes of fairy tales). Out of all this overpowering output, the books which seem most destined to survive are his tetralogy Parade's End, and the novel The Good Soldier, with the possible addition of his literary reminiscences.

From 1898 to 1909, he collaborated with Conrad, working in sometimes intimate contact, and published three novels

⁵⁷E. K. Brown, "James and Conrad," Yale Review, XXXV (Winter, 1946), 282.

as a result of the collaboration: Romance, The Inheritors, and The Nature of a Crime. In the first part of the century he edited two of the most successful literary magazines of the time, The English Review and the transatlantic review, and was "one of the few great editors of this century."⁵⁸ During the 'twenties he was a very popular novelist in both England and America and achieved popularity before Conrad had published his first novel. His life, 1873-1939, extends from the trailing remnants of the Pre-Raphaelite movement through the highly formative years of modern fiction into the beginnings of World War II. He was in close contact with most of the important literary minds of his period, although the extent of the relationships he undoubtedly exaggerated. Because of his place as a close friend of the great and because of his penchant for writing fully and with great charm about his associations--reporting conversations, telling anecdotes, evaluating reputations--his books of reminiscences are essential to a thorough understanding of the Impressionists. A still more important aspect of his peculiar and essential position is given by Allen Tate:

The only man I have known in some twenty years of literary experience who was at once a great novelist and a great teacher, in this special sense, was the late Ford Madox Ford. His influence was immense, even upon writers who did not know him, even upon other writers, today, who have not read him. For it was through him more than any other man writing in English in

⁵⁸Caroline Gordon, "The Story of Ford Madox Ford," New York Times Book Review (September 17, 1950), p. 1.

our time that the great traditions of the novel came down to us. Joyce, a greater writer than Ford, represents by comparison a more restricted practice of the same literary tradition, a tradition that goes back to Stendahl in France, and to Jane Austen in England, coming down to us through Flaubert, James, Conrad, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway.⁵⁹

The reason for Ford's considerable influence was his driving interest, almost obsession, with technique, the skills of his craft. Over and over, in all of his non-fictional writing, he discusses the "how" of writing a novel, style, structure, characterization, selection, and discusses it from the point of view of a practitioner. "He attempted to awaken in himself and others the realization that great art ultimately depends more on the means of construction and expression than on the original idea itself."⁶⁰ His eminence as a teacher came because only he (and, of course, James) among his contemporary Impressionists wrote about the form of the novel to any extent. He was, in a large part, the catalyst for the unshaped theories of Conrad, and he was able to put into words and critical concepts the search for a New Form. Conrad, Hudson and Crane were not concerned with intellectualizing the techniques and devices which interested them so vitally, and although James wrote much about his techniques, he was the Master who at times demonstrated a curious blind spot in viewing the importance of his contemporaries. Ford was well aware of the revolution taking

⁵⁹Allen Tate, "Techniques of Fiction," Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 35.

⁶⁰Gosse, p. xiii.

place and did all within his power to actualize it; he also recognized, often with sound taste, the precise way in which each of his colleagues was contributing to the change. Conrad spoke of him, in a letter, as "a man with a fine sense of form and a complete understanding for years of the way in which my literary intentions work themselves out."⁶¹

To track down all of the precise influences Ford exerted upon the impressionist novel would be an endless task and not the primary purpose of this study. The attempt to define literary impressionism which follows in the next section is largely the concept stated by Ford, and which he spoke of as his "method." Of considerable pertinence, however, is Ford's collaboration with Conrad, mentioned in scattered references through Ford's literary memoirs and described in detail in Ford's book, Joseph Conrad.

Ford styled the book his "impression of a writer who avowed himself impressionist," and "a novel . . . a portrait . . . a work of art," rather than a factual biography.⁶² The method of the book is to present sharp, vivid impressionistic patches, apparently digressive but unified by tone, which give the "impression" (and thus to Ford the essential truth) Conrad's unique personality made upon Ford. Documentation is ignored in order to be faithful to "the truth of the impression as a whole."⁶³ The book is a remarkable view of

⁶¹Jean-Aubry, II, 101-2.

⁶²Joseph Conrad, p. 6.

⁶³Loc. cit.

Conrad's personality as well as an extremely fruitful source of information about the techniques of two highly skilled novelists.

The reputation of the book is not without its detractors. Immediately after its publication in 1924, Conrad's editor, Edward Garnett, reviewed the book and commented upon its distortions, feeling that Ford had exaggerated the extent of his influence upon Conrad.⁶⁴ The battle over whether Ford taught Conrad or vice versa has waged since the publication of Ford's book, with very little being decided in the process. A contemporary novelist who owes a considerable debt to both Ford and Conrad, Graham Greene, has spoken recently of Ford's technique as "the method Conrad followed more stiffly and less skilfully, having learnt it perhaps from Ford when they collaborated on Romance."⁶⁵ H. G. Wells comments that "Conrad owed a very great deal to their early association."⁶⁶ In all probability, the truth about the relationship lies in the description of the "third person" who took over when their collaboration was most effective, particularly in certain passages of Romance.

But the writer heard his own voice as, in the low parlour of the Pent, he read aloud the passage that concerned Mr. Topnambo, the blue night, the white trousers, the barouches standing in the moonlight waiting for Admiral Rowley and

⁶⁴The Nation and Athenaeum, XXXVI (December 6, 1924), 366, 368.

⁶⁵"Ford Madox Ford," The Lost Childhood and other Essays (New York: Viking Press, 1952), p. 91.

⁶⁶Experiment in Autobiography, p. 531.

his intoxicated following to take the road.
 And then Conrad interrupting. . . . "By Jove,"
 he said, "it's a third person who is writing!"⁶⁷

The actual procedure used in working together seems to have been long, exacting work sessions in which Ford, usually, read aloud what had been written by each, and Conrad commented, often without restraint, until a clear rapprochement was reached. Much of the conversation between the two was about technique, and the success of the collaboration was due to the agreement both had upon how a particular effect was to be achieved. In general, Conrad provided the color, the stylistic richness and heart of the material, while Ford furnished the outline and basis, although this was by no means consistently true. According to Ford, the plot suggestions for Romance, The Inheritors, and The Nature of a Crime were his; Conrad was infatuated with the possibilities of the material, especially Romance, or Seraphina, as Ford had first entitled the basic plot, and formed Ford's sometimes banal and over-sentimental situations into fuller novels. However, Ford gives the feeling that he often had to control Conrad's extravagances in style and his penchant for melodrama. Conrad's greater stature should not overshadow the fact that at the time of their first meeting, Ford was a fairly mature and successful writer. Conrad's importance in the collaboration can easily be overestimated, and it is important to remember that before his contact with Ford, he had published only his two "apprentice" novels--

⁶⁷Joseph Conrad, p. 45. The ellipses are Ford's

Almayer's Folly, and An Outcast of The Islands--and The Nigger of the "Narcissus." His greatest work followed during and after the collaboration; it is obvious that his technique shows marked changes later.

Ford spoke of himself humourously as "the finest stylist in England,"⁶⁸ and even though his intention was irony the description was not entirely inaccurate. Both he and Conrad had a preoccupation with language that was as great as that of James, Hudson, and Crane. Ford narrates an incident very much in the spirit of Flaubert's cabbages:

. . . the writer drove from just such a ramshackle, commonplace farm-building in an undistinguished country over slight hills on a flinty by-road and heard Conrad saying to him: "Well, Ford, mon vieux, how would you render that field of wheat?" . . .

He went on thinking first of French and then of English: "Champs de blés que les vents faibles sillonnaient.... Cornfields.... No, not cornfields, because that, to Americans signifies maize.... Wheat-fields.... Fields of wheat that the weak.... feeble.... light... what sort of winds, breezes, airs...." There is no occupation more agreeable on a still day: it is more restful, really, than fishing in a pond.... "Fields of wheat that small winds ruffled into cats'-paws. ... That is of course too literary...."⁶⁹

The great continental novelists, Flaubert, Turgenev, Maupassant, were almost passionately admired and read by Conrad and Ford; each could quote sizeable passages from Flaubert, and, Ford records, the two often did so as a kind

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 31-2. To distinguish them from my own, I have indicated Ford's ellipses by single spaced periods.

of game. Conrad's second language was French--the first of course Polish--which he spoke more fluently than he did English. Ford says of himself, "The writer writes French better than he does English."⁷⁰ The most important gain from the close association with French was probably discipline, the precision which French alone can offer.

Conrad's indictment of the English language was this, that no English word is a word: that all English words are instruments for exciting blurred emotions. "Oaken" in French means "made of oak wood"--nothing more. "Oaken" in English connotes innumerable moral attributes: it will connote stolidity, resolution, honesty, blond features, relative unbreakableness, absolute unbendableness--also made of oak. . . . The consequence is, that no English word has clean edges: a reader is always, for a fraction of a second, uncertain as to which meaning of the word the writer may intend. Thus, all English prose is blurred. Conrad desired to write a prose of extreme limpidity. . . .⁷¹

Ford was on good terms with the rest of the Impressionists, but apparently he was not always so intimate with them as he was with Conrad. He knew and visited James often, as has previously been mentioned. He liked Crane very much, but for some unknown reason Crane regarded him as a Pre-Raphaelite, still hanging on to his brocaded past, and made him responsible for the excesses of that group. Crane also showed a deep understanding of Ford's chameleon nature in a letter to a friend, a letter which Ford never tired of quoting: "You must not mind Hueffer, that is his way. He

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 104.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 214. All of the ellipses are Ford's.

patronises me, he patronises Mr. Conrad, he patronises Mr. James. When he goes to Heaven he will patronise God Almighty. But God Almighty will get used to it, for Hueffer is all right."⁷²

Ford's habit of assuming personae and of aiming only at the truth of his impressions makes the filtering of fact from his memoirs difficult and perhaps not even important for Ford's kind of truth. His great grasp of technical principles, his constant experimentation and his ability to transmit his knowledge have made his influence on modern fiction vast and pervasive, so much so that it will probably never be fully realized. Conrad's friendship for Ford seemed to wane a little before Conrad's death, but his technical debt to him did not.

These were the writers with whom Conrad was associated, and from them and their views toward the techniques of writing he learned a great deal. He had no real idols among the traditionally great English novelists, with the exception of his Impressionist contemporaries, and nearly all that is significant in his own methods can be found in or suggested by the Impressionists. His debt was not through direct imitation but based on a common concept of the way a novel should be written and the material with which it should be composed. Since some of Conrad's ideas were fixed before he had very close contact with the group--

⁷²Return to Yesterday, p. 32.

the famous preface to The Nigger of The "Narcissus" is in 1897--it seems safe to assume that the ideas came from the same source, the French. It is also true that Conrad contributed considerably to impressionism; he was not the young apostle who picked up the ideas of the Impressionists and utilized them, for he was a novelist of above average skill before he ever became intimate with the others in the group, and, as Ford points out, his statements in the preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" were a kind of credo for Impressionism.⁷³ Before examining Conrad's own methods it is necessary to look more closely at the general body of ideas which he and the other Impressionists had in mind when they used the term "impressionism."

3. Impressionism

Impressionism is a term more proper to the visual arts than to literature. It was first applied in contempt by a journalist to those French painters of the latter nineteenth century who rebelled against the academic tradition of David and Ingres. The first exhibition of the French Impressionists was in 1874, and they had reached public and critical acceptance just a few years before Ford and Conrad began their collaboration. Exactly how much interest was taken by the impressionist novelists in the French esthetic theory is open to conjecture, but Crane, James, and Ford all show at least surface interests in painting: Ford through his

⁷³Joseph Conrad, p. 168.

Pre-Raphaelite background and books of art criticism; Crane's associations with impressionist painters in New York and his own amateur dabbling; and James' tales of artists and his interest in esthetic themes.⁷⁴

Whether or not the writers consciously borrowed their theories from the painters is perhaps not so important as is the esthetic similarity in the two movements. A definition of the term as it is applied to painting fits the literary movement as well. The intention of impressionism is "to portray the effects or 'impressions' of experience upon the consciousness of the artist or an observer with whom he identifies himself, rather than the objective characteristics of things and events."⁷⁵ The painters denied outline, saying, quite accurately, that in nature there is no outline, only color set against color. For the careful classical draftsmanship of the academic painter, they substituted colors broken by light, hazy misted outlines, pure colors--all giving the indirect view of experience. Against the impressionist painters' belief that "atmosphere . . . is the real subject of the picture,"⁷⁶ can be paralleled the novelists' conception of subject as "not what happened but what someone felt about what happened."⁷⁷

⁷⁴Stories of Writers and Artists, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York: New Directions, 1944).

⁷⁵The Reader's Encyclopedia, ed. William Rose Benét (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1948), p. 537.

⁷⁶James Huneker, Promenades of an Impressionist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 230.

⁷⁷Henry James, The Art of The Novel, p. xviii.

The Impressionists in painting and in the novel were both rebellious against the traditional standards of form. They searched for a different vision of reality, a truer one because it uncovered its truths indirectly. To achieve this goal they did not reject completely the past. The Post-impressionists--Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat--placed greater emphasis upon technique, experiments with form: Cezanne's very influential use of geometric forms; Gauguin's color symbolism; and Seurat's "pointillism." This development was reflected in the novelists' awareness of technical disciplines: rendering, the progression d'effet, selection. Although it would be questionable to assert too close a relationship between the painters and the writers (both genres have widely differing intentions), they were, at the core, much the same in basic attitude.

James, Crane, and Conrad used the term "impressionism" in reference to prose fiction, but it was Ford who defined it most clearly as a program for the creation of a new form in the novel. Because his concepts were the most influential upon Conrad, and because they derived from Crane and James, a step by step analysis of Ford's "method" is important.

The general effect of a novel, says Ford, "must be the general effect that life makes on mankind."⁷⁸ Life does not strike us with reported factual narrative, but with vague impressions, brief flashing glimpses, often closely

⁷⁸ Joseph Conrad, p. 190. The explanation which follows is taken in a large part from the same book (pp. 179-215).

interwoven with our personal interests. The approximate way in which this concept operates in fiction can be seen by looking first at a passage in Fielding's Tom Jones, the section early in the book when the author introduces us to Squire Allworthy.

In that part of the western division of this kingdom which is commonly called Somersetshire, there lately lived and perhaps lives still, a gentleman whose name was Allworthy, and who might well be called the favourite of both Nature and Fortune; for both of these seem to have contended which should bless and enrich him most. In this contention Nature may seem to some to have come off victorious, as she bestowed on him many gifts, while Fortune had only one gift in her power; but in pouring forth this, she was so very profuse, that others perhaps may think this single endowment to have been more than equivalent to all the various blessings which he enjoyed from Nature. From the former of these he derived an agreeable person, a sound constitution, a sane understanding, and a benevolent heart; by the latter, he was decreed to the inheritance of one of the largest estates in the county.⁷⁹

Recognizing of course that the description is lifted from context and that Fielding was writing at least a hundred years before anyone thought of the novel as a serious form with serious intentions, we can see in the passage clearly what the Impressionists were trying to avoid. They would probably have asked, just what do we really know about the Squire from this passage? We know his habitation, that he is blessed with a kindly nature, a good constitution and material wealth, as Fielding has told us directly. But the really important details about the character are left out.

⁷⁹Henry Fielding, The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), pp. 3-4.

We really see, and hear and feel, the Squire later in the book, when he is easily hoodwinked by Thwackum and Square; when he suffers through Tom's numerous escapades; when he so generously (and so neatly for Fielding) welcomes Tom back to his ample bosom. In other words, Squire Allworthy actually comes alive only through his impressions upon others, their impressions upon him, through the living, human color of his actions and his thoughts, and not through what Fielding "tells" us about him.

If we were to meet the Squire somewhere--taking a great many liberties with both Squire Allworthy and Fielding--it would not be the kind of details given in this passage which affected us. It might be that the good man had a curious habit of picking his teeth with a gold toothpick, which would remind us of our uncle who had once been a section boss on the railroad and who had married, in old age, a retired music teacher with a great mass of black hair piled into a pompadour. We might remember that the aunt sang hymns in an embarrassing cracked voice and used a heavy violet scent, and, in turn, that the uncle cut up five-cent cigars for chewing tobacco--and innumerable other impressions suggested by the single detail of the toothpick. It is this sort of detail which composes the effect of life upon us--so felt the Impressionists; and the real truth of our experience lies in the seemingly unimportant flow of our impressions; ". . . we saw that Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains."⁸⁰

⁸⁰Joseph Conrad, p. 182.

It was obviously impossible to compose a novel filled with just uncontrolled impressions. Even the later novelists who employed the "stream of consciousness" method--Virginia Woolf, James Joyce--channeled the impressions into a pattern of meaning, incidentally using a device very close to Ford's association of impressions. It was necessary for the Impressionist novelist to select from the complex internal reactions to experience just those impressions which were to provide the meaning of his novel. When he presented these impressions to the reader, he had to do so indirectly, since an author telling a story must concentrate on events--"plot" can be seen as a series of events--and it is only through suggestion that the reactions to events can be accurately shown in fiction. The method which resulted was a key device in the modern novel, what Ford calls "rendering."

No other single technique has had such a significant impact upon modern fiction as that of rendering. As Allen Tate has shown, its possibilities were first recognized by Flaubert in Madame Bovary.⁸¹ It was a dominant theme in James' prefaces, and an intrinsic part of Ford's critical vocabulary and fictional technique. One of the clearest statements of its rationale occurs in Conrad's preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus."

All art . . . appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must

⁸¹"Techniques of Fiction," *passim*.

strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music--which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.⁸²

As Ford and Conrad used the term "render" it included several related ideas all based on the writer's responsibility to show the reader dramatically the persons, events, or moods which were important in the novel. Summary narrative, exposition, the long tedious passages of explanation of the traditional novel are sliced away cleanly, and the reader is plunged into an immediacy with the material of the novel. He confronts the characters and events at a specific hour and place and watches as they act, listens as they talk, and feels the emotions and moods they feel. Whatever effect is to come from the material of the novel is up to the reader, who reaches the final effect from the writer's arrangement and selection of detail rather than his instructions. Because rendering when it functioned ideally was wholly objective--the characters and action talk instead of the author--the writer often had to suggest specific moods and emotions by the use of concrete, precise details.

⁸²Joseph Conrad, The Nigger of the "Narcissus," The Medallion Edition (London: The Gresham Publishing Co., Ltd., 1925), p. ix.

If a novelist was to convey a feeling of depression in a scene, he was not to say, "There was a feeling of depression"; he had to select details which suggested the mood: a spluttering gas-light, a heavy, pounding rain, an empty bleakness of the room. An even better example of the principle is given by Ford, who is speaking of Crane's use of the "method":

"But it was perhaps Crane of all that school or gang--and not excepting Maupassant--who most observed that canon of Impressionism: 'you must render; never report.' You must never, that is to say, write: 'He saw a man aim a gat at him'; you must put it: 'He saw a steel ring directed at him.'"⁸³

An interesting similarity and possible parallel to the Impressionists' device of rendering in fiction can be found in one of the most famous, and controversial, terms of modern criticism, T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative."

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.⁸⁴

Eliot's term, or Eliot's version of the concept, is not far removed from the directed indirections of rendered material in fiction. Both are part of the tendency in contemporary art to move towards suggestion, implication, and symbolism, and away from the explicit and prosaic. A valid history

⁸³Ford, "Techniques," p. 31.

⁸⁴Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1949), p. 145.

of modern poetry and fiction could be written in terms of their dependence upon the oblique and subtle aspects of experience, and the vastly different techniques necessary to present these aspects.

If the reader is to reach his effects from the rendered characters and action alone, it is necessary for the author to absent himself as much as possible from the work, to allow the characters and scenes to work themselves out. As long as the author is visibly present, commenting over our shoulder upon the progress of the plot, telling us what to feel and see, our attention is divided between story and author. Thus author effacement is essential to rendering. It is impossible for the author to be completely invisible--he is selecting what we see--but the one object of dramatizing is to make him as unnoticeable as possible, so that we readers are closer to the experience of the novel. Several problems were presented by such a departure in fictional technique. In the traditional novel the author could himself narrate necessary exposition, describe his characters in full, direct detail, set scenes and jump from setting to setting at will--all done externally, of course. To solve the problem resulting from this loss, the Impressionist presented much of his material from inside his characters' minds, subjectively; he did not narrate; his characters saw. Often the "psychological" quality of James, Conrad, and Ford comes from their technique of focusing the material through the consciousness of the characters. This placed

the reader in the center of the experience, the reality which the Impressionists sought.

In order to give form and order to the largely internal matter of a novel, the writer used a restricted viewpoint, or point of observation. By limiting the material of the novel to just what the focus-character, or characters, was able to perceive, he gained a definitive principle of order and intensification; the restricted viewpoint added to the desired immediacy of the experience, and conveniently solidified the focus-character since his perceptions were shaped and modified by his sensibility.

The extent to which the novelists were faithful to the ideals of rendering their material varies considerably. James, the most rigid purist of them all, even in his later novels occasionally steps in as author--unobtrusively, to be sure--and at times steps outside the viewpoint of his character. Conrad is criticized by one critic for his tendency to both render and narrate at the same time, to overwrite.⁸⁵ Crane and Ford in their best work are strongly dramatic and immediate. In one of Ford's best novels, The Good Soldier, in which a first person narrator is used, nearly all of the material is rendered, and the book has a rich texture of complex relationships. However, it is impossible to present dramatically all of the material in a novel, for not everything is important enough to be

⁸⁵F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, pp. 174-82.

isolated in dramatic presentation.

A clear result of such an oblique approach to the material of a novel is the difficulty it presents to a reader. Without an omniscient author to lead him by the hand through the mazes of the novel, the reader must find his own way and is quite likely to go astray unless he makes a considerable effort to concentrate on all the pathways. However, as Ford constantly repeated, the purpose of any technique was to please the reader. Much of the difficulty in reading an impressionist novel comes when the reader is unwilling to bring to the novel his full intelligence. As a matter of fact, the complete change which the novel has made since the eighteenth century, from a pleasant diversion to a conscious art form makes necessary an intelligent reader--just as serious painting, music, and poetry have always demanded an intelligent audience.

Still another added difficulty to the reader of novels was caused by the Impressionists' refusal to use the form as a vehicle for a thesis: "The one thing that you can not do is to propagandise, as author, for any cause."⁸⁶ The use of events and characters in a novel as illustrations of an idea was discarded; "Your business with the world is rendering, not alteration."⁸⁷ This does not mean that a novel should be devoid of meaning, but that the author cannot twist or distort his experience to illustrate a

⁸⁶Ford, Joseph Conrad, p. 208.

⁸⁷Loc. cit.

preconceived idea. A reader accustomed to Wells' social criticism, Thackeray's moralizing, was discomfited when he found that the impressionist novel did not attempt--in the usual sense--to "prove" anything; on the other hand, it did not merely amuse either. The meanings were not simple and clear but complex and numerous.

A view of life as a vast canvas of changing impressions necessitated a complete shift in the attitude towards structure in the novel. If a novelist begins with such a detail as Squire Allworthy's gold toothpick, and follows the thread of associations wherever it leads him, the result can be a long series of digressions--digressions unless the associations are the essential experience of the novel. Molly Bloom's long internal monologue which closes James Joyce's Ulysses is a rambling series of related ideas because Joyce wanted an accurate picture of her thoughts; the digressive quality is inherent in the way she, or most of us, thinks. The Impressionists, however, did not want the thread of associations as such, although Ford makes frequent use of the stream of consciousness in Parade's End. As Ford points out in his discussion of structure, "In writing a novel we agreed that every word set on paper--every word set on paper--must carry the story forward and, that as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster with more and more intensity."⁸⁸ In this delineation of the progression d'effet, it seems clear

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 210.

that "story" was much more precise guiding principle than pure association of ideas. It was the novelist's task to impose form and selection upon the subtle shades and tints of impressions.

The antipathy felt by many readers for the modern novel-- and the cold receptions at first given to James and Conrad-- derives also from the violation of traditional chronological narrative structure which the Impressionists felt was necessary in so many of their novels. Conrad's Lord Jim, Chance (and many others), Ford's The Good Soldier, and James' The Ambassadors, for example, are structured on an entirely different principle. The structure was "an attempt to reproduce in words life as it presents itself to the intelligent observer."⁸⁹ A novel was to be "the rendering of an Affair; of one embroilment, one set of embarrassments, one human coil, one psychological progression." To achieve this, "a Subject must be seized by the throat until the last drop of dramatic possibility was squeezed out of it."⁹⁰ Life contained "a woven symbolism of its own,"⁹¹ and to find this pattern it was necessary to see the "affair" from all possible angles, internally and externally, through various minds--the intelligent observers, Marlow and Strether. The linear chronology was too straightforward

⁸⁹Return to Yesterday, p. 210.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 209.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 210.

to show the pattern; it could be done only by a psychological progression within the "affair," or subject of the novel. The novelist takes the subject, holds it up in various lights, examines it microscopically, and breaks it up into a multitude of focuses until it is seen completely and wholly; hence the so-called directed indirections are the structure--and the subject. Only a very few impressionist novels are straightforward, and the characteristic broken and "digressive" structure of the Impressionists is accepted technique in the modern novel.

There are other aspects of "the method" which interested the novelists extensively--style, dialogue, beginnings and conclusions--but all of these were only specific extensions of the basic concept, that life presented itself to us indirectly, through suggestion, and that the novel must present its form this way also. In short, the novel was to be an attempt to make precise and exact, in an organic form, some of those subtle shades of meaning which come from our impressions, the way we reach our experience.

It was largely from these concepts, this rather loosely constructed manifesto, that Conrad developed his methods.⁹²

⁹²An interesting view of Conrad's dependence upon his contemporaries is given by J. H. Retinger: "There was no dogmatism in Conrad's attitude towards his own work, which, indeed, had never been based on any abstract theory. Since he never frequented the society of professional writers, his manner of writing was unbiased by heterogeneous influences, and not marred by inhibitions taken from some mannerisms of an exclusive literary school or coterie." Conrad and his Contemporaries (London: Minerva Publishing Co., 1941), p. 90.

It is necessary to understand that this was his foundation-- his methods were not wholly unique among his contemporaries-- in order to see his techniques in proper historical perspective. This is particularly true for Conrad because his curious biographical backgrounds and his frequent choice of exotic subjects can obscure the fact that his contemporaries were exploring much the same technical areas as he. However, Conrad's novels are much more than a technical demonstration of a concept, and we learn very little of significance about his method just by finding a historical basis for it. It is from his novels, from examining the ways he put them together, the functions of his language, the devices he used to present his material, that we learn the really important meaning of his method.

CHAPTER II

STYLE

It is a mistake to abstract the mechanical aspects of a novelist's prose style and neatly label them his "style," for the exact manner in which he chooses and orders his words is beyond any technical analysis. It is intrinsically a part of his sensibility and his vision. Prose style, the selection and arrangement of words, does not exist in vacuo. Words are the means of expressing ideas and meanings, the way in which the novelist reaches the patterns of meaning which are his novel. Although his success in achieving his goal varied, for Conrad, it was "only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance" that the "magic suggestiveness" which he constantly sought could be expressed.¹ The progression d'effet which was so essential to the Impressionists' esthetic demanded that every word contribute to the final effect which the novel attempted. Style was only one element of the whole structure.

However, it is possible, and can be illuminating, to look at a writer's work and find in it consistent patterns

¹Joseph Conrad, The Nigger of the "Narcissus," The Medallion Edition (London: The Gresham Publishing Co., Ltd., 1925), p. ix. For the balance of this study, all references to Conrad's works will be to this edition, and whenever possible, just the title and page numbers will be given in the text.

of language, repeated verbal devices, characteristic choices of words and sentence structures, and by analyzing these arrive at some valid conclusions about his use of language. This is particularly true for Conrad, who is so often described with the critical cliché "a great stylist." Although the description is trite, it contains much truth, for probably no other characteristic of his writing is so individual and so distinct as is his prose style.

We commonly judge the effectiveness of a novelist's style to a great extent upon how successfully he realizes the resources of his native tongue, but this standard is obviously not applicable to Conrad because of his curious language background. The facts of his unique position in world literature as a writer achieving fame in a language not his own are well known: he was a Pole by birth and nineteen before he learned English, twenty-three before he had mastered it (he preferred the word "acquired") enough to pass an examination for officer in the Merchant Service, and thirty-eight when his first novel was published in 1895. Having been given an upper class Polish academy education, he spoke French fluently and certainly could write in that language with more ease than he could in English. According to Ford Madox Ford, Conrad said that his "intimate, automatic less expressed thoughts" were in Polish, and when he wrote he thought in French and translated the words into English.²

²Joseph Conrad, p. 37.

In his autobiographical A Personal Record, Conrad gives his reasons for choosing English, or rather for English choosing him, and says that "If I had not written in English I would not have written at all" (p. viii). The linguistic significance of his tri-lingual background is far too complex for present purposes, but conjectures about its effect upon his prose style are possible and can help to explain why it was so highly individual.

It would seem that the involved process of translating from language to language would have given Conrad's style a precision. The act of searching for a verbal equivalent in another language--although it is not always possible to find one--naturally leads one to exactness because the act of translation forces a slowing down process, a concentration upon words; it is the hesitation, the necessity of finding the exact word, that makes a style precise, or at least makes the writer much more conscious of words themselves. But, in one sense of the word, Conrad's style is not precise. The early novels are filled with passages that are rich, luxuriant, and often cloying with a sensuous wealth of detail. The details are themselves, however, nearly always exactly defined. Each separate detail is not blurred or vague, but the mass of them together, along with other technical weaknesses, often softens the edges of a passage, as will be shown later. The fault, if it is fair to call it a fault, is not always in the failure to choose the exact words which convey the essence of a detail, but in the failure to select just those

details which are essential and to build them into a sharply focused effect.

Miss M. C. Bradbrook suggests another possible result of Conrad's complex language background: "Conrad's descriptive rhetoric is the most characteristic part of his style, and perhaps it could only have been achieved by one to whom English was not the mother tongue."³ He was able to achieve this combination of "magnificence and sincerity," says Miss Bradbrook, because he lacked the self-consciousness of a native writer. There is some validity to this certainly; Conrad was untrammelled by the fear of triteness (and he was often guilty of it), or of too obvious emotion, qualities which are part of the equipment of any native writer. But the judgment is questionable if it suggests, and it definitely implies, that Conrad was not sensitive to connotation. There are many descriptive passages in the novels which seem to function primarily as atmosphere, to set the mood and tone of a scene, and mood is quite impossible without an awareness, on the writer's part, of connotation, "magic suggestiveness." A slip, a false jarring word, can destroy the whole tone of a passage which depends upon the associations of the words used, and Conrad is rarely guilty of this. The only points at which his connotations are weak are in dialect, and only infrequently, or when he tries to set up a colloquial or provincial "English" tone. How he should have acquired in nineteen years any of the vast, complex

³M. C. Bradbrook, Joseph Conrad: Poland's English Genius (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1941), p. 54.

levels of associations peculiar to English--associations which are integral parts of environment and a lifetime of speaking the language--is a question almost impossible to answer. It is this which is perhaps the most unexplainable and astounding accomplishment of his genius.

Miss Bradbrook's term "descriptive rhetoric" suggests a quality of Conrad's prose which can be traced, in part, to his language background. The word "rhetoric," in the usual literary sense, implies a conscious, artificial use of language for artistic effect, a use of devices which emphasize words as separate entities, the beauty, sound, color which they contain intrinsically. Much of Conrad's so-called "gorgeous word painting"⁴ which fills the early novels in great patches, lessening considerably in the last four or five works, is basically rhetorical, the conscious selection of words for a calculated effect. It seems reasonable to assume that Conrad's love of the word came from his necessary process of going from one language to another, especially since French, his most fluent language, is by nature very precise. Any novelist is of course deeply involved with verbal problems, but only a few have been as distinctly so as Conrad. The loving care which he and Ford displayed in seeking to render the wheat-field is an example of the way in which Conrad must often have created.

⁴A. C. Baugh et. al., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 1555.

It is possible to find many qualities in Conrad's "purple" prose which are essentially artificial: the frequency with which he used alliteration, vowel assonance, parallelisms, balanced clauses, periodic sentences (which are not characteristic of modern English prose); his carefully cadenced paragraphs, certainly more French than English; the peculiar nature of his English generally, which was, as Virginia Woolf says, "wooded characteristically for its Latin qualities rather than its Saxon."⁵ These devices at their best are beautifully effective, but more reminiscent of seventeenth century prose than of modern; (Miss Bradbrook suggests that Conrad read Jeremy Taylor,⁶ and Conrad's father translated Shakespeare into Polish.)

There have been many attempts to describe the unusual quality of Conrad's prose, and with little agreement in the process. Virginia Woolf speaks of his "august abstractions,"⁷ and H. G. Wells his "wonderful Oriental style."⁸ Arthur Symonds unaccountably places Conrad with Baudelaire and Poe as a worshipper of evil, and says that his prose "has in it something fantastically inhuman, like fiery ice,"⁹ a clever

⁵"Joseph Conrad," The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1925), p. 310.

⁶Bradbrook, p. 59.

⁷"Mr. Conrad: A Conversation," The Captain's Death Bed, p. 80.

⁸Ford, Joseph Conrad, p. 51.

⁹Arthur Symonds, Notes on Joseph Conrad (London: Myers & Co., 1925), p. 12.

description but hardly a helpful one. David Daiches finds his early style "a little over-adjectived,"¹⁰ but Retinger reports that Conrad felt a writer should "above all things, avoid unnecessary adjectives."¹¹ Other commentators have described the style as "a splendid smoke-screen, a dazzling tapestry of magnificently sonorous language";¹² "a mosaic of little crepitations of surprise";¹³ and a "Latin, harp-like rhythm."¹⁴

If there is a common ground in this catalogue it is that Conrad's prose is like no other. But as divergent as the descriptions may seem, all of them are basically accurate--at least in terms of the early style: Conrad employs Latinate abstractions often; he is lavishly Oriental, over-adjectived, rhythmic, sonorous, and dazzling. For lack of a better word, his prose is consciously rich, that is the prose which most readers associate with him, the style best displayed in the Malaysian novels--Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of The Islands, Lord Jim--and The Nigger of the "Narcissus." There is a toning down of language evident from about 1911 on, or perhaps even as early as Nostromo. It will be of

¹⁰David Daiches, The Novel and The Modern World (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 63.

¹¹Retinger, p. 93.

¹²Walter Allen, p. 295.

¹³Ford Madox Ford, "On Conrad's Vocabulary," Bookman, LXVII (June, 1928), 407.

¹⁴Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914), p. 181.

interest to examine the nature of this "soft richness"¹⁵ which has come to be regarded as Conrad's typical style.

Edward Crankshaw, in the only study of Conrad's technique of real importance, makes a careful distinction between the novelist who has "style" and a novelist who has "a style."¹⁶ Style in writing, he says, is "perfect action, itself a series of perfect actions in perfect harmony."¹⁷ The writer who possesses it has "a complete and perfect instinctive knowledge of his own powers and limitations over and above the reasoned knowledge which all artists must have and to which each new work is a challenge."¹⁸ A musical analogy can be seen in Mozart, who had style, and Beethoven, who did not. This is the "perfect blending of form and substance" which Conrad desired but did not have because he was a writer with "a style." This writer is one who sees words as a means of recreating the subjective vision he has in his mind--for Conrad nearly always a visual one; he sees words as fixed images, as devices to reconstruct an image; "it is the use of the word as a token, as a symbol,"¹⁹ and his words "are the servants of a fixed and predetermined image, which has nothing in itself to do with words and which exists independently of them."²⁰ The

¹⁵Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁶Edward Crankshaw, Joseph Conrad, Some Aspects of The Art of the Novel (London: John Lane, 1936), pp. 216-244.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁹Crankshaw, p. 222.

²⁰Loc. cit.

writer with the rare gift of style--Crankshaw gives this to Ford; Hudson and James might be added--sees words as "living verities themselves."²¹ "The born writer simply writes. . . . He thinks and feels in terms of words, words which for him are the germs of infinite suggestion."²² Crankshaw does not intend his distinction to be qualitative, but explanatory, for he says that Conrad "is one of the greatest writers of prose that the world has ever produced."²³

Keeping Crankshaw's distinction in mind, it is not difficult to see that Conrad's language difficulties almost inevitably made him a writer with "a style," and a style which is basically artificial. The visions were clear in his mind and it remained for him to make them concrete in English prose; in doing so he would have to see words as devices for recreating the visions. Nearly all of Conrad's biographers have shown that almost all of the characters in the novels, actually all of the material he ever used, were part of his personal experience.²⁴ He rarely created anything out of whole cloth, manufactured original people and situations. The material was there and his creative problem was giving it life in English.

²¹Ibid., p. 223.

²²Ibid., p. 243.

²³Ibid., p. 217.

²⁴This relationship is largely the thesis of a recent book: E. H. Visiak, The Mirror of Conrad (London: Werner Laurie, 1955).

If we accept this tendency in Conrad to consciously write "a style," to employ devices for effect, much of the nature of his "rhetoric" is clear. One of the most marked results of this stylistic method is the lamentable and frequent lack in many of his descriptive passages of a focus, a governing point of view which would control the detail. If we examine a passage from Almayer's Folly, his first and most clearly "rhetorical" novel, the lack of focus can be illustrated. The following selection occurs in the scene in which Dain and Nina Almayer have their tryst:

As they passed together out of the red light of the fire into the silver shower of rays that fell upon the clearing he bent his head over her face, and she saw in his eyes the dreamy intoxication of boundless felicity from the close touch of her slight figure clasped to his side (p. 173).

Many of the qualities of Conrad's "purple" prose can be seen here at their worst and best: the brilliant contrast of color; alliteration, "the silver shower of rays"; the rolling abstractions which really show nothing, "the dreamy intoxication of boundless felicity"; and, above all, the lack of focus. Apparently the opening clause is seen by an omniscient author; he narrates and describes from outside the two lovers. Then we are suddenly seeing through Nina's eyes, "she saw in his eyes." But what Nina sees--ignoring its pompous vagueness--is what only Dain could have felt: "the close touch of her slight figure." We jump from an omniscient author to Nina to Dain, and the task imposed upon the reader tends to blur the effect of the passage. Conrad seems to wrench the viewpoint for the sake of the beauty in the words.

An example which is not quite so obvious can be found in the famous description of the Patna setting out to sea in Lord Jim.

. . . on each side of the Patna two deep folds of water, permanent and sombre on the unwrinkled shimmer, enclosed within their straight and diverging ridges a few white swirls of foam bursting in a low hiss, a few wavelets, a few ripples, a few undulations that, left behind, agitated the surface of the sea for an instant after the passage of the ship, subsided splashing gently, calmed down at last into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly in its centre (p. 17).

There is here an undeniable achievement in language in the tradition of impressionism. The description has color, sound, touch, some economy of language ("low hiss"), and the sentence has a poised cadence which brings it close to the intensity of poetry. The picture of the sea--the point at which Conrad was always the most eloquent--has a vivid beauty, although there are some slight inaccuracies in the adjectives, denotative inaccuracies: it is hard to see folds of water as being "permanent" and "sombre"; a shimmer which is "unwrinkled"; and ridges which are both "straight" and "diverging." The passage is faintly unsatisfying in more important ways. To see these opening details we would have to be on the deck of the Patna watching the ship cut the water, and the subsiding wake, but suddenly with the last phrases, "the black speck of the moving hull," we are at a point high above the ship, presumably high enough to see the "circular stillness of water and sky"; the viewpoint is abruptly switched. It seems as though Conrad were unwilling to let pass the cosmic image

of the Patna--in itself a striking image--and so tacked it on; the result ends the passage in a visual cloud.

The obvious switch in viewpoint (a technical problem which obsessed Conrad) decreases after The Secret Agent, but even in the last, most mature novels there is a weakness of focus in crucial descriptive passages. In his last complete novel, The Rover, there is a passage in which Arlette, one of Conrad's most successful heroines, makes her determination to talk to the village priest. As a result of the intense suffering she has undergone from the terrors of the Revolution, Arlette has become a passive and silent ghost, and only begins to awaken when she falls in love with the French naval lieutenant. Here she is being slowly drawn to the village priest and the consequent opening of her heart to him.

Above her head under the thin grey sky a big mulberry tree stirred no leaf. Step by step, as if unconsciously, she began to move down the track. At the end of fifty yards she opened the inland view, the roofs of the village between the green tops of the platanes overshadowing the fountain, and just beyond the flat blue-grey level of the salt lagoon, smooth and dull like a slab of lead. But what drew her on was the church-tower, where in a round arch, she could see the black speck of the bell which escaping the requisitions of the Republican wars, and dwelling mute above the locked-up empty church, had only lately recovered its voice. She ran on, but when she had come near enough to make out the figures moving about the village fountain, she checked herself, hesitated a moment and then took the footpath leading to the presbytery (p. 147).

The style is admirably controlled, as functional and refined a prose to be found in any of the novels. The color, the "thin grey sky" and the "blue grey lagoon" like a "slab of lead,"

reflect Arlette's frame of mind perfectly and set the tone of the passage. The scene is through her eyes--"she could see"--and the details are clear, precise, and follow in a natural progression to the focal point, the bell which drew her on (the "black speck" again). But Conrad wanders with the long clause immediately following, "which escaping the requisitions of the Republican wars" This is not from Arlette's viewpoint; it is Conrad's comment, and it is not consistent with the clean step-by-step progression of detail. It is inconsistent rhythmically, the long roll jarring in the midst of clipped, precise detail, and the essentially abstract quality of the language breaks from the concrete precision of the passage. However, the description of the bell in itself is impressive stylistically, and it makes the muteness of the bell a perfect symbol of Arlette, who has "escaped the requisitions" of the Revolution, only to dwell mute until today when she is recovering her voice. Even while the clause does this thematically, it is out of context tonally, rhythmically, and focally. The bell by itself would serve as an objective correlative of the whole emotional situation, but Conrad makes it explicit, almost as though he mistrusted the bell to carry its meaning implicitly.

It is this tendency--the making the implicit, explicit, actually both rendering and telling--which F. R. Leavis deplores in Conrad's prose. He describes it as a refusal to allow the concrete incidents to speak for themselves. "The

essential vibration emanates from the interaction of the particular incidents, actions and perceptions that are evoked with such charged concreteness,"²⁵ another way of defining what Ford called "rendering." Instead of relying on this, Conrad feels "that there is, or ought to be, some horror, some significance he has yet to bring out,"²⁶ and over-elaborates what is already there. There is some justice to this criticism, one often made of Conrad; his preoccupation with ways of presenting his material dramatically is a major force in his structural experimentations, and will be discussed more thoroughly under that heading. The struggle is clearly reflected in the style, however, and can be seen early in the novels. A few examples will illustrate, these from that graveyard of magnificent faults, Almayer's Folly.

He shivered in the night air, and suddenly became aware of the intense darkness which, on the sun's departure, had closed in upon the river, blotting out the outlines of the opposite shore. Only the fire of dry branches lit outside the stockade of the Rajah's compound called fitfully into view the ragged trunks of the surrounding river where the drifting logs were hurrying toward the sea through the impenetrable gloom. He had a hazy recollection of having been called some time during the evening by his wife. To his dinner probably. But a man busy contemplating the wreckage of his past in the dawn of new hopes cannot be hungry whenever his rice is ready. Time he went home, though; it was getting late (pp. 11-12).

The scene is early in the novel. Almayer is gradually awakening to reality from his reverie, and we see, through his perceptions, his state of mind, rendered by the view of the

²⁵The Great Tradition, p. 177.

²⁶Ibid., p. 179.

river and his faint recollection of having been called. But Conrad interrupts with a direct judgment about a man "contemplating the wreckage of his past," or at least it is difficult to see Almayer having enough objectivity to feel this at this time. Even the last direct thoughts are not enough to bring us back to Almayer. The statement is an explicit comment on what is perfectly obvious in the directly projected scene.

In the following paragraph, Almayer starts home:

He stepped cautiously on the loose planks toward the ladder. A lizard, disturbed by the noise, emitted a plaintive note and scurried through the long grass growing on the bank. Almayer descended the ladder carefully, now thoroughly recalled to the realities of life by the care necessary to prevent a fall on the uneven ground where the stones, decaying planks, and half-sawn beams were piled in inextricable confusion (p. 12).

Obviously if Almayer is stepping "cautiously" and "carefully" he has been "thoroughly recalled to the realities of life," and all of the author's direct explanation makes it no clearer. In both of these passages, the shift from dramatic to expository calls forth Conrad's worst sort of abstract language.

The same sort of shift occurs at times in The Nigger of the "Narcissus", a novel which in general is more successfully rendered (possibly because Conrad uses a narrator) than its two predecessors. Here, Donkin has left the dead Jimmy Wait in his cabin and walks out on the deck.

Sleeping men, huddled under jackets, made on the lighted deck dark mounds that had the appearance of neglected graves. Nothing had been done all through the night and he hadn't been missed. He stood motionless and perfectly astounded to find the world outside as he had left it; there was the sea, the ship--sleeping men; and he wondered absurdly at it, as though

he had expected to find the men dead, familiar things gone for ever: as though, like a wanderer returning after many years, he had expected to to see bewildering changes.

The passage continues as Donkin feels the effect of the scene.

He shuddered a little in the penetrating freshness of the air, and hugged himself forlornly. The declining moon drooped sadly in the western board as if withered by the cold touch of pale dawn. The ship slept. And the immortal sea stretched away, immense and hazy, like the image of life, with a glittering surface and lightless depths. Donkin gave it a defiant glance and slunk off noiselessly as if judged and cast out by the august silence of its might (p. 155).

Conrad is apparently trying to squeeze the scene for its last possible effect. It is an important one, coming right after the vividly presented death watch of Donkin over the "nigger," because it must cap the highly dramatic climax of Wait's death, and, in terms of the descriptive detail alone, it is an effective one. Donkin's mood, or better, the mood which the reader should feel, is captured in the sleeping men, the quiet complacency set against the violent horror of the dead man in the cabin--all of this is suggested by the detail. Donkin's surprise that the world has gone on despite him is clear too, clear enough so that the superfluous simile of the "wanderer" muffles the perception instead of heightening it. Continuing, Conrad objectifies Donkin's reaction to the night by his shuddering, and the declining moon, although it hardly seems that the moon should have to droop "sadly" and, in the next sentence, that the sea should have to be "immortal" and "like the image of life" because these are not objectively rendered details. Again, in the last sentence, Donkin's slinking off noiselessly is quite enough: the image of the

criminal being judged by "the august silence of its might" is unnecessary. It is interesting that in this passage the shift from the indirect to the direct exposition is always in the form of a simile, a rhetorical device tacked on to make the obvious more obvious, but a figure with verbal beauty of its own. This too is a result of Conrad's essentially calculated style, his love for effect in words sometimes to the exclusion of larger effects.

F. R. Leavis feels also that Conrad's penchant both to render and to tell results in an "emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce";²⁷ the chief effect of this is the recurrence of such words as "inscrutable," "inconceivable," "unspeakable," and the like, often clashing in a passage otherwise concrete. These may result from an occasional inability to express the specific, as Leavis suggests, and they may also be used for the pure effect of their sound. Richard Curle comments upon the same quality of words ("immense," "mysterious," "impenetrable") and finds it a part of Conrad's "cadence of language."²⁸ The use of resounding abstractions, many of which are privatives, is also more characteristic of the early style, but the words are a definite quality of all of Conrad's prose. It is in the most obviously rhetorical passages that these most often occur, as in this from Lord Jim: ". . . The irresistible slow work of the night settling silently on all the visible forms, effacing the outlines, burying the shapes deeper and

²⁷The Great Tradition, p. 180.

²⁸Richard Curle, p. 19.

deeper, like a steady fall of impalpable black dust" (p. 306). There are far too many examples in the novels to make further illustration necessary. The rolling abstractions are only a specific indication in Conrad's style of a general insistence upon the sound of words, sometimes more so than upon their denotative meaning.

The love of words for their sound is expected in a prose style that is basically rhetorical--the word "rhetoric" is etymologically the same as "orator." Conrad's style is built upon sense perceptions, in the tradition of impressionism, and sound would be a part of a whole perception, but Conrad goes further: he not only uses words to convey a sound to the reader, but he uses them for their intrinsic sound. Some examples, again from Lord Jim, will illustrate. (The italics are mine.)

The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls, and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movement in the world seemed to come to an end (p. 322).

There is at times simple vowel assonance: ". . . intense and as if for ever suspended in their expression" (p. 330). There is also the fugue-like pattern of vivid vowel sounds:

The spires of churches, numerous, scattered, haphazard, uprose like beacons on a maze of shoals without a channel; the driving rain mingled with falling dusk of a winter's evening; and the booming of a big clock on a tower striking the hour, rolled past in voluminous, austere bursts of sound, with a shrill vibrating cry at the core (pp. 337-38).

The description of Jewel in Stein's apartments is a perfect blending of sound and sense: "Her white figure seemed shaped

in snow; the pendent crystals of a great chandelier clicked above her head like glittering icicles" (p. 348).

The experiments with sound decrease in the later novels with the "purple" rhetoric, but there are examples of the same device in several of the "mature" novels. In The Arrow of Gold, Conrad plays on consonants: "My very thoughts were like a ghostly rustle of dead leaves" (p. 229). And in The Rover, that novel with its great French precision of language, appears this description of the tartane, words which begin in a liquid roll and end in a sharp crack:

. . . but lonely and prominent on the beach,
lying on her side in weather-beaten melancholy,
there was a two-masted tartane with her sun-
whitened cordage hanging in festoons and her
dry masts showing long cracks (p. 83).

In the same novel, the word "sombre" is used at least ten times, each time with its usual function as a sign that a flight of rhetoric is forthcoming.

Closely related to Conrad's verbal sound--and possibly even a part of it--is his calculated use of alliteration. It is also in Lord Jim, a sort of treasure house of all of Conrad's richest prose, that this device is used most often and most effectively. Most commonly the alliteration is upon sibilants, as in "the sinister splendour of the sky" (p. 15); "we sweltered side by side in the stagnant superheated air; the smell of mud, of marsh, the primeval smell of fecund earth, seemed to sting our faces" (p. 331); in Almayer's Folly is the almost painfully obvious view of the river as a "stream of scintillating silver" (p. 146). A paragraph at

the close of Nostromo has an interesting internal alliteration and playing with liquids (and the obtrusive "black speck" again).

The light of the Great Isabel burned unfailing
above the lost treasure of the San Tomé mine.
Into the bluish sheen of a night without stars
the lantern sent out a yellow beam towards the
far horizon. Like a black speck upon the shining
panes, Linda, crouching in the outer gallery,
rested her head on the rail. The moon, drooping
in the western board, looked at her radiantly (p. 565).

Conrad's sensitivity to sound is curious in view of the fact that he either was unaware of it or took pains to hide his awareness. All of his acquaintances agree that he spoke English with a barbarous accent, at times almost incoherent.²⁹ He himself said in a letter, "Having unluckily no ear, my accentuation is uncertain" ³⁰ This becomes even more unusual when his skilful use of cadence and sentence and paragraph rhythms is noted. A possible answer to the problem can be seen in Ford's recording of a disagreement which he had with Conrad concerning cadence: "It was the writer's view that everyone has a natural cadence of his own from which in the end he cannot escape. Conrad held that a habit of good cadence could be acquired by the study of models. His own he held came to him from constant reading of Flaubert."³¹ And so the cadence, like many of the other stylistic devices, was calculated and not natural, remembering of course that naturalness of cadence would be difficult to any foreigner

²⁹Ford, Joseph Conrad, p. 201.

³⁰Jean-Aubry, II, 124.

³¹Joseph Conrad, p. 200

to a language.

Since Conrad used such a complexity of rhythms--as he would have to do in such a considerable body of work--it is difficult to come to any specific conclusions without examining specific selections from the novels, except to note a general employment of balanced clauses, parallelisms, periodic sentences, and imposed devices for rhythmic effects. Much of the richness of his early style comes from the overuse of these devices; many of the "polyphonic effects of closings to paragraphs"³² which Ford so admired were carefully structured sentences, almost with the sense twisted for the cadence. An example of a very artificial cadence is from Almayer's Folly:

In that supple figure straight as an arrow, so graceful and free in its walk, behind those soft eyes that spoke of nothing but of unconscious resignation, there slept all feelings and all passions, all hopes and all fears, the curse of life and the consolation of death. And she knew nothing of it all. She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either. The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except of a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger, which was seldom, for Bulangi was rich and rice was plentiful in the solitary house in the clearing (pp. 112-13).

The long periodic sentence with its elaborately balanced phrases at the close is followed by a short, simple sentence. Then there is a loose sentence with four equal modifying phrases. The repetition of the monosyllabic "no" twelve times

³²Ibid., p. 201.

in the next three sentences pounds the rhythm far beyond necessity, but does set the flowing clause which closes the passage in contrast. Whatever effect the passage may have rhythmically, it is clear that the effect is a conscious one.

Fortunately, the elaborate rhythmic devices lessen in use from Nostromo on, and in The Rover, twenty-one years later, the prose is almost free of Ciceronian artificiality (a quality which, however beautiful it may be in seventeenth century masters, is not particularly adapted to the novel form). Razumov in Under Western Eyes is in a world without sound after Nikita brutally smashes his eardrums, and the cadence of the sentence mirrors this perfectly: "The lightning waved and darted around him its silent flames, the water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove--noiseless like the drift of mist" (p. 369). The inversion of the first clause (placing "water" next to "fire"), and the quick fleeting verbs, "fell, ran, leaped, drove," function perfectly with the meaning, instead of leaping out and proclaiming themselves to the reader.

It would be reasonable to expect that the sensitivity of Conrad's ear would be important in his use of dialect, which, although not strictly speaking a stylistic trait, would illustrate his ability to catch specialized speech rhythms. In general he is careful not to attempt any distinctly different dialects, but there are characters in the novels who must "come alive" through a special dialect, and Conrad's transcription varies considerably. Ford has said that the Cockney in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" is "barbarously

inaccurate"³³ and there is no question that Conrad confuses the various dialects: Donkin, the Cockney, Little Belfast, the Irishman, and Lane Knowles at times all speak in the same strange medley of Cockney, precise public school English, Yankee, and shipboard jargon, with little attempt to distinguish among them--for example, Donkin's Cockney: "'A'n't yer never seed a man 'ard up? Yah! What kind of blamed ship is this? I'm dead broke. I 'aven't got nothink'" (p. 12). Archie, in the same novel, the Scot owner of the concertina, has a brogue a little too much like a music-hall Scotchman: "'Yon's an uncanny joker. I dinna ken what's wrang wi' him, but there's something verra wrang, verra wrang'" (p. 36). The frequently ejaculated "Ough" of Baker, the mate, is repeated far more than a suggestion of a speech characteristic would justify.

There are dialects which are successful; one of the happiest of these is the skipper of the Stein's brigantine, in Lord Jim, who speaks English as though it were derived from a "dictionary compiled by a lunatic" (p. 238). The resulting malapropisms are a rare example of colloquial humor in Conrad. The skipper speaks of being fired on by "'irresponsive parties'" which may have caused the brig to be stranded on the sand, where she "'would have been perishable beyond the act of man"; and he says someone is falser than the "'weapons of a crocodile'" (p. 239). Conrad would

³³Ford, "On Conrad's Vocabulary," p. 406.

have been sympathetic with this sort of situation. Also in Lord Jim, Stein's dialect is quite successful, probably because Conrad just suggested it, sometimes with typical Germanic syntax: "'One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure'" (p. 212). European dialects are much better than English: Stein, Schomberg, the French lieutenant in Lord Jim; the anarchists in The Secret Agent. Conrad has a tendency to intersperse native expressions, particularly French or German, into a character's speeches, and it is sometimes difficult to understand a reason for doing so. The most obvious example is the French lieutenant in Lord Jim, whose English narrative is studded with parenthetical French phrases, usually the equivalent of an English phrase he has used. Since the French is largely in parentheses it seems to be Conrad's attempt to make the English expression more precise; at least there is little justification otherwise; the lieutenant is speaking English with an obvious French accent: "'One has done one's possible'" (p. 141).

Peyrol, in The Rover, punctuates his speech with French, using it interchangeably with English, although this is inconsistent too. Conrad's attempt to make Peyrol's speech colloquial often results in unfortunately obvious English slang: "' . . . I mean one of those chums that stand up for fellow in a scrimmage . . .'" (p. 235), and "' . . . jolly well sold'" (p. 95). Such language in the mouth of a hard-bitten old French pirate leans towards the ridiculous. When Peyrol speaks to the English seaman in English, a

language which he supposedly speaks only a little, the dialect is curiously inconsistent again. His opening words are, "'You look bien malade, hein? What you call sick . . .'" (p. 128), and on the next page he has dropped the dialect completely: "'If I had met you anywhere else but looking at my tartane I would have done nothing to you. I would have permitted you to go back to your boat. Where was your damned boat?'"

One clear conclusion to be drawn from the dialect in all of Conrad's novels--and for that matter all of his renderings of individual speech patterns--is that he is much more successful when he suggests the distinction than when he tries to transcribe it literally. He had no real ease in dialect of any kind, although his Europeans speak with convincing accents most of the time. His attempt at literal transcriptions are artificial and inconsistent, as though it were a ruse he couldn't continue for long, and strike the reader eventually as another device, a conscious rhetorical method for achieving verisimilitude.

If Conrad is properly called an impressionist, then it would follow that he makes some use of color in his style, for contrasts, shades, light are essential for the subtleties of sensory experience. Conrad's stated intention, "to make you see,"--clearly shaping the basically visual quality of his style--would of course make color an integral part of his method. Color is employed most commonly in the novels as a leit motif, a dominant tone in the novel, or it functions as a Cranelike symbolism--all of which is more

properly discussed under another heading. Stylistically, however, color provides some of the most brilliant of his images. The favorite colors are gold and silver, possibly because of their rich connotation as well as their visual impact. The two colors are symbolic in Almayer's Folly (and of course Nostromo) and are frequently set against a dark background. Blades of grass are "like a design of silver sprays embroidered on a sombre background" (p. 157); and the description of silver guilders and golden sunsets are interwoven through the book. In An Outcast of The Islands, clouds brush by the moon, "now appearing in her diffused rays with the brilliance of silver, now obscuring her face with the blackness of ebony" (p. 49). The moon calls forth Conrad's richest palette: in Lord Jim, "The young moon recurved, and shining low in the west, was like a slender shaving thrown up from a bar of gold . . ." (p. 17). This image, or variants of it, was a favorite of Conrad's: also in Lord Jim (five pages later), "The thin gold shaving of the moon . . ." (p. 22); and in Almayer's Folly, ". . . the smooth black surface of the sea with a great bar of gold laid on it by the rising moon" (p. 11). In the following passage from Almayer's Folly we may lament the "hurried messenger of light," but the colors are the pure, brilliant colors of an impressionist painting:

The sun, rising above the calm waters of the Straits, marked its own path by a streak of light that glided upon the sea and darted up the wide reach of the river, a hurried messenger of light and life to the gloomy forests of the coast; and in this radiance of the sun's pathway

floated the black canoe heading for the islet which lay bathed in sunshine, the yellow sands of its encircling beach shining like an inlaid golden disc on the polished steel of the unwrinkled sea (p. 186).

Color, of course, is not the only aspect of Conrad's style which is sensory. Such images as that in The Rover describing Arlette's cheek, "like the light of a distant flame on the snow" (p. 175), are a rich blending of more than one sense. Conrad is truly an impressionist in his constant attempt to capture the wholeness of an impression, and when he succeeds, which is often, there are few writers of English prose who can do so with so evocative a language.

There are other general qualities of Conrad's prose too minor for extensive analysis but important enough to note in passing. One of these is his gift for catching brief, diamond-sharp perceptions: Donkin, in The Nigger of the "Narcissus," of whom Conrad says, "It was his deserved misfortune that those rags which nobody could possibly be supposed to own looked on him as if they had been stolen" (p. 10); in the same novel, the cook, who beams "like a conceited saint unable to forget his glorious reward" (p. 32); and in the scene with Marlowe and the French lieutenant in Lord Jim, the waiter who "looked on critically, as though he had paid for the performance" (p. 149). There is also Conrad's often unfortunate love for abstract Latinate words, his syntactical boldness--using structures no native writer would dare attempt, his tendency to use description in blocks, and, of more than minor significance, the way in which description functions as atmosphere. These qualities too, like those already

discussed, are by their use rhetorical, imposed upon the material consciously, rather than the result of a free, natural flowing of language. This is not to imply a qualitative judgment because, as has been suggested, they arose from a necessity, an unusual language background. And the devices are only rhetorical in the sense that they are artificial, not in the sense that they exist wholly for their own sake alone.

It has been said often in this discussion that Conrad's style changes for the better--or at least, the purer--through the course of the twelve novels. This position is not shared by all of his commentators. For example, Walter Allen says that from 1910 on Conrad's style "gives way to rhetoric," and implies that there is a similar development in technique generally.³⁴ This judgment ignores several factors, one of which is subject. The early Malaysian novels--Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of The Islands, Lord Jim--are set in the richest of settings, the exotic, vegetating lushness of the tropics, a setting which would call forth purple prose from even the most restrained of stylists. The Nigger of the "Narcissus", his third novel, is set at sea and is considerably less rich stylistically, and several of the "middle" novels are set in comparatively restrained settings: Russia, Switzerland, London. That there is a development even beyond subject can be seen in The Rescue, which returns to the same characters and backgrounds of the Malaysian novels, and

³⁴Walter Allen, p. 295.

which is twenty years after Lord Jim. This novel has little of the lush rhetoric of those early attempts; this is possibly why even Conrad's most fervent admirers admit that it is a dull book. Also seemingly ignored in the judgment is the increased knowledge of the language which Conrad would certainly have gained, by 1910, from writing seven novels, two collaborations, five volumes of short stories, and two books of personal reminiscences. Richard Curle has remarked, as early as 1914, on the "subtler achievement" of Conrad's later prose which could be traced to "a more accurate conception of English."³⁵ One concrete example of this increased mastery can be seen in the lessening frequency with which simple grammatical errors appear. In the early novels there are not infrequent slips: ". . . laying down to rest under the bright stars, she closed her eyes" (Almayer's Folly, p. 48); ". . . a stifling sob that sounded strangely coming from that woman" (Almayer's Folly, p. 115); ". . . the old man lift his head so sharp that his nose nippers fell off . . ." (Lord Jim, p. 39); and there is a lack of consistency in cases of the relative pronoun, the proper placing of "only," and subject and verb agreement ("... a whisper or two have reached me" (Lord Jim, p. 188)). But these slips are not at all unreasonable considering that Conrad, as he maintained, "never opened an English grammar in my life."³⁶ In the early style

³⁵ Richard Curle, p. 182.

³⁶ Jean-Aubry, II, 125.

there are also some inaccuracies in the use of words--

"misapprehended" for "misunderstood" being most common--and a slightly irritating repetition of "as was his wont." Cliches abound, some which a native born writer would immediately recognize: in Almayer's Folly, "In his mind's eye" (p. 65), "the dumb agony of a wounded animal" (p. 115), "the mysterious hand of Fate" (p. 118), "Quick as lightning" (p. 160); and in Lord Jim, "as old as the hills" (p. 13), "dressed up to kill" (p. 77). All of these rather petty "faults" naturally decrease as Conrad gained more fluency with English, and from as early as 1904 (Nostromo) on there are few difficulties with the mechanics of English, and these almost completely disappear from the last complete novel, The Rover.

Miss Bradbrook has spoken of the "rarified clarity of the writing" in The Rover,³⁷ and Conrad himself said, in a letter, "This is perhaps my only work in which brevity was a conscious aim."³⁸ The pure, clear style of the novel is such a striking contrast to the richness of the early novels that it deserves special illustration. Here again subject is a determining factor in the quality of the style; the book is set in a somewhat barren section of the French Mediterranean coast, the main character, Peyrol, is a simple, sincere seaman--not a complex-ridden Almayer or Jim--and with few notable exceptions the action of the novel is not violent. Conrad seems to have made an attempt to throw

³⁷Bradbrook, p. 75.

³⁸Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1928), p. 298.

off the trappings of his early style and concentrated his language upon an exact rendering of details not rich and exotic in themselves. There are relatively few gorgeous moons and shimmering seas; many descriptions are marked by their clean simplicity and precision, such as this from the kitchen of the inn:

Through the open back door a large square of sunshine fell on the floor of stone flags. Outside one could see quite a mob of expectant chickens, while a yellow hen postured on the very doorstep, darting her head right and left with affectation. An old woman holding a bowl of broken food put it down suddenly on a table and stared. (p. 29).

Possibly the next step in a purely functional prose would have been the elimination of the impersonal "one" in the second sentence and the substitution of "bread" for "food" as the contents of the bowl; but it is clear that in this sort of description Conrad is not building his language up artificially for effect, but is allowing the words to make precise the details of the scene, the latter being more important. This is what Oliver Warner meant when he said that in The Rover, Conrad wrote with "a serenity seldom to be found in his earlier books," and that the novel has a "Gallic simplicity of idea and of sentence."³⁹ This "Gallic" quality, sublimating language for the exact and subtle rendering of detail, naturally leads to a general simplicity in sentence structure, a paring down of "august abstractions," and a less rhetorical style--all of which is quite true of the prose style in The Rover.

³⁹Oliver Warner, Joseph Conrad (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951), p. 126.

The refining of language is also evident in Conrad's use of dialogue in the novel, not usually one of his strongest or most realistic stylistic qualities. The trend is towards a more Fordian type of dialogue, indirect but dramatic, sometimes abrupt but always true to the mental state of the speaker rather than the exigencies of plot or rhetorical effect. This conversation is reminiscent of Ernest Hemingway:

"There is fish there," said the old man.
 "And is the boat all your worldly goods?"
 asked Peyrol.
 The flies buzzed, the mule hung its head,
 moving its ears and flapping its thin tail
 languidly.
 "I have a sort of hut down by the lagoon
 and a net or two," the man confessed as it were.
 Peyrol, looking down, completed the list by
 saying: "And this dog" (p. 17).

This change, or development, in style does not take place suddenly with Conrad's last novel, but is a gradual process with evidences of its occurrence as early as Nostromo, and once again it is subject which determines the level to some extent. The Secret Agent with its maze of violence, police intrigue, and tawdry revolutionists, all set in the slums of London, is hardly the sort of novel in which Conrad's characteristic "word painting" would fit; its very subject demands restraint, as does the irony which is its chief method. The details of, for example, Verloc's shop window would seem to need heightening because of their mundane nature, but Conrad does not embroider or embellish them; he simply renders them concretely.

The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six

in heavy black figures; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books, with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like The Torch, The Gong--rousing titles. And the two gas-jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers (pp. 3-4).

The impact of the description comes because of Conrad's eye for significant details, not his gift of sonorous language--exactly the reason which gives The Rover its precision of style. Often when Conrad was faced with the sea, the steaming jungles of Malay, or the turbulence of a tropical storm, his style tended to become elaborate. It was more than just this, however, because the rhetoric never entirely disappears.

There is a curious inconsistency in the later novels. Although the style is undeniably less artificial, the novels themselves are inferior. The Arrow of Gold and The Rescue are far too long and frequently tedious. Even The Rover, which has been praised as one of his greater novels,⁴⁰ is actually only a good novel until the closing scenes when Conrad pulls in Lord Nelson, the British Fleet, and History, with a self-conscious patriotism never so obtrusive in his other novels; and the contrived ending lacks sincerity, a fault not usual anywhere with Conrad. Victory is a possible exception to this, but it is much more varied stylistically and structurally than the novels which follow it. It is almost as though that as his style became less conscious,

⁴⁰Warner, p. 126.

the novels weakened. The best works are probably in Conrad's "middle" period, 1904-1914: Nostromo, The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, and Chance. The lack of fire in the later novels may be due to a gradual drying of the sources of his invention; The Rescue returns to earlier characters and settings, The Rover has, for Conrad, a simplified plot, and The Arrow of Gold is the most intensely autobiographical of any of the novels. Certainly the rich complexity of subject is lacking in these works of his declining years, and he often repeats previous characters, scenes, and plots. It is reasonable to assume that Conrad eventually used up most of his material because probably no other writer in English utilized his personal experience so completely as Conrad did. And, as has been noticed previously, his increasing facility with English would account for his more functional prose in these last three novels: a greater ability to reach the French ideal of style which he was certainly aware of from his reading of Flaubert.

In summation, this analysis has attempted to show that Conrad's style, the most characteristic and most easily apprehended quality of it, is basically rhetorical, a manipulation of language for conscious effect. This can be seen in his occasional slips in viewpoint, his love for the inherent sounds and colors of words, his tendency to use resounding abstractions, conventional rhetorical devices, and his carefully constructed rhythms and cadences. This quality can be attributed partly to his peculiar language background

and partly to the quality beyond critical grasp, his natural talents. He was, to use Crankshaw's distinction, a writer with "a style," and not a writer with style. But this is not to say that his style is weak or inferior, because the very "faults" which it has, the rhetorical nature of its structure, are the qualities which give it its uniqueness, a style like no other in the English novel. It would be an error to condemn Conrad for not writing like Hudson or Ford. His great color and rolling, polyphonic cadences, his vivid intensifications of words are an achievement it would be foolish to deny. He utilized his gift fully, and this is everything we can ask of any artist.

CHAPTER III

SYMBOLISM

The whole complex problem of symbolism in fiction is one which presents a myriad of difficulties for the critic because here more than anywhere else is there need for specific definition and terminology. It might even be presumptive to assume that the symbolism in a novelist's work is an aspect of his technique, for it is nearly always impossible to say accurately that any given symbol is the result of conscious selection by the novelist. On the other hand, it might be argued that the latter factor is of no importance in analyzing the design of a novel--it is the work and not the novelist's psychological processes which an analysis of this sort is concerned with. At any rate, it is necessary to establish some basic definitions and clarify some assumptions before attempting to examine the use of symbols in any specific novelist's works.

A symbol, in its most general sense, is a representation of something other than itself: in literature, words, incidents, objects, characters, sounds, colors, extended beyond their conventional meaning to include one or more other levels of meaning, consistent in context, but going more deeply into abstract experience than does their "external" meaning. In

order for something to be properly symbolic in a novel, it must have also a realistic function; it must imply a meaning other than and in addition to itself. A symbol provides a meaning available in no other way because it is a particular focal point which draws together unrelated generalized elements and because it probes deeper into human consciousness than any other form of communication.¹ A specific illustration is helpful at this point (from The Secret Agent). Verloc, the tawdry "secret agent" of the novel, is preparing for bed, feeling lonely and disconsolate at the plight of a peaceful man being forced into violence.

Down below in the quiet, narrow street measured footsteps approached the house, then died away, unhurried and firm, as if the passer-by had started to pace out all eternity, from gas-lamp to gas-lamp in a night without end; and the drowsy ticking of the old clock on the landing became distinctly audible in the bedroom (p. 57).

On one level the passage is simply an attempt to capture Verloc's precise state of mind through his impressions, and the footsteps, the gas-lamps, and the ticking clock are the concrete details which solidify the impressions. But these latter details can be read with an additional meaning. There are many direct and indirect references in the novel to time: the central incident is the attempted bombing of Greenwich Observatory; at the close the book, Ossipon addresses the mad Professor, saying, "'Your scurvy, shabby, mangy little bit of time'" (p. 306), and "'Eternity is a damned hole'" (p. 305);

¹For a thorough discussion of the nature of symbolism in human experience and the necessity for its use, see Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: The New American Library, 1953).

and in one of the crucial scenes between Verloc and Winnie, there is a passage echoing that previously quoted: "She let the lonely clock on the landing count off fifteen ticks into the abyss of eternity . . ." (p. 181). These are just a few of several examples, but enough to indicate that the theme of time (in both a literary and musical sense) is important in the novel and is frequently implied by the use of conventional symbols relating to it. The gas-lamps also play an important role, casting their flare with its artificial, corrupting light over every important scene in the essentially scenic novel.

One great danger in a reading of symbols is that the critic will wrench certain details out of any normal context to fit his preconceived pattern, and this is certainly true in a heavily atmospheric novelist like Conrad, who lends himself so easily to multi-leveled readings. The only safeguard to this error is to insist that symbols be consistent in context, that they build around the central core of meaning in the novel, instead of introducing a tangential theme which is outside the novel. In other words, levels of meaning should not be read into the novel but should grow from it.

This problem leads into still another area of doubtful procedure, that of the determination of author's intention. For historical purposes, Conrad was certainly aware of the necessity of symbolism in complex art. He says, in a letter to Barrett Clark in 1918, that

a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite

conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character.

And in the same letter,

All the great creations of literature have been symbolic, and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty.²

While these comments suggest that Conrad was aware of the symbolical nature of art, they do not, of course, mean that he consciously selected every multi-leveled meaning it is possible to find in his novels. And, as has been suggested before, whether or not the symbolism was always deliberately intended--in the sense of Conrad's actually selecting and utilizing these meanings--is in reality another study, the ways in which his mind operated as he wrote. A statement by R. W. Stallman on just this subject is more complete.

Once a work of art is produced, it possesses objective status--it exists independently of the author's intention and contains within itself the reason why it is thus and not otherwise--and it takes unconditional precedence over any externally ascertainable information that author or scholar may provide.³

If it is agreed that this examination of symbolism will confine itself to the novels themselves, as nearly as possible, and assume that all symbolic meanings are valid if they are consistent within the framework of the novel itself, that "intention" is applied to the works and not to Conrad's explicit wishes, then much of the semantic difficulty can be clarified.

²Jean-Aubry, II, 205.

³R. W. Stallman, "A Note on Intentions," College English, X (October, 1948), 40.

However, this assumption should not imply that Conrad was not a conscious artist, that his best effects come from the critics who search them out, because the effects are there to be read; it is the nature of symbolic communication in art that such meanings are more frequent when the artist goes more deeply, more significantly, into his experience. To return to Conrad's comments on the subject, the greatest works of art will contain the most varied levels and greatest amount of meaning because of their complexity, power and depth. A novel like Tom Jones, or even Conrad and Ford's Romance, both of which are basically "histories" or chronicles of external events and characters, will not need to employ as much symbolic or metaphoric meaning, since much of the intention of the novel is on the surface. But The Nigger of the "Narcissus," for example, is really not so much about the external happenings on the ship as it is about the effect of these events upon the men, effects which are internal, "psychological," and difficult to convey by external means. This is not to suggest that the one novel is better, or "greater," than the other--such a judgment would involve many other considerations--but that each seeks its meaning in quite different ways.

Not all of Conrad's novels contain a multiplicity of indirect meanings; or to be more accurate, symbolism varies in extent with the depth of subject presented. Thus The Nigger of the "Narcissus," Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, Chance, and Victory approach their subjects through depth and intensity rather than through primarily

surface events and characters as do, to some extent, the other novels. Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of The Islands are special cases because they are more "internal" than any of Conrad's other novels, but the symbolism in them is often considerably contrived, many times in a proper sense not symbolism at all but pure analogy carefully set up by the author for illustration.

In Almayer's Folly, for instance, there are long passages of nature description which are obviously planted for more than atmospheric effect. The jungle is seen as an endless and violent evolutionary struggle, the creepers "carrying death to their victims in an exulting riot of self-destruction" (p. 165), with lovely and brilliant blossoms "crowning their victims . . . incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees" (p. 167). These passages present, as Wiley points out, a view of "nature fallen, raw, untrammelled by any restraints of civilization or morality, a garden of death for those who cannot struggle, like the feeble Almayer, who has sought paradise in nature and through a careless alliance with passions of which he was ignorant."⁴ Almayer is defeated because of his rejection of civilization, his marriage to a Malay and his inability to understand the primitive emotions of his daughter Nina, who is, in a sense, an exotic blossom growing from the decay of her origins.

⁴Paul L. Wiley, Conrad's Measure of Man (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 36.

But such a symbolic use of nature (also quite similar in An Outcast of the Islands) is conventional in literature, and Conrad, in nearly every instance, makes the symbolism explicit, actually drawing what amounts to an analogy between the ceaseless struggle of the jungle and the decay of the white trader. This may or may not be a flaw, but it poses a legitimate question about the effectiveness of symbolism. If a symbol conveys a meaning only possible through the implication of its relationship, then an object or quality which has a stated relationship to that which it signifies is weak symbolically, for the author has provided the significance directly instead of suggesting it. Also, if the symbol is explicit it no longer is externally real, or at least not as real, because it becomes a device for illustration, an analogy, a simile, or possibly even allegory. The jungles, the river, the whole exotic background of both Malaysian novels is seen through a haze of similes, metaphor, and elaborate language that removes it from reality. It is just this same tendency to manipulate and force meanings beyond their necessity which we have seen was characteristic of Conrad's prose style. The explicit symbolism never entirely disappears in the novels (for example, the arrow in The Arrow of Gold, the lonely tree on Peyrol's lookout point in The Rover, and the gilt thunder in Lingard's cabin in The Rescue). Those symbols which are inherent and grow from the subject adding other levels of meaning and still remaining functional are perhaps of much more importance to the design of the novels.

A convenient way of viewing Conrad's use of symbols is through categories, which, although they may be somewhat arbitrary, at least allow a systematic way of reaching conclusions about the place of symbolism in the novels. First among these is the use of color. As it has been mentioned previously, various colors are interwoven through the novels, sometimes as a leit-motif echoing themes, or adding new dimensions of meaning. The colors are used most often for their conventional associations--red for blood and for violence; white for purity, cleanliness; black for evil, darkness, etc. The device is very much like that noted in Stephen Crane's prose, and it is appropriate that it should appear most clearly in that most Cranelike of all of Conrad's novels, The Nigger of the "Narcissus."

There is relatively little of Conrad's characteristic melodrama or plot complications in the novel: the ship takes on board a Negro, James Wait, who, because of his apparent malingering (but actual sickness), casts a mysterious spell on the ship and its crew which is lifted only when the "nigger's" body slides to burial in the sea. But while the events are simple, the novel has as complex a texture of meaning as any of Conrad's work. Much of this depth comes from the symbolic threads woven through the book, adding considerable thematic dimension.

The dominant colors in the novel seem to be black and white. The story opens at night; Wait first appears on board in darkness and also dies at night; much of the significant action occurs in shadow and flickering lamplight: the

cook's violent religious frenzy over Wait; the attempted mutiny and Donkin's hurling of the belaying pin at Captain Allistoun; and even when Wait is rescued from the smashed cabin there are clouds darkening the sun (p. 67). The whole general atmosphere of the novel is one of grey darkness.

The two colors are contrasted, one set clearly against the other, all through the novel, with their conventional associations--white, purity and knowledge; black, evil and mystery--strengthening the theme. Early, before the "Narcissus" sets to sea and after Wait's arrival on board, Creighton, the young mate, gazes into the night thinking of "a lane of waving leaves and dancing sunshine," and "a girl in a light dress" (pp. 21-22). In the following paragraph the forecastle is ominously described: "The double row of berths yawned black like graves tenanted by uneasy corpses" (p. 22), the first of several references to death. As the "Narcissus" is going out to sea, "resembling an enormous and aquatic black beetle" (p. 27), she leaves in her wake "a round black patch of soot . . . an unclean mark of the creature's rest" (p. 27). Just before the violent storm which occurs several days later, "The sunshine gleamed cold on the white curls of black waves" (p. 49), and in the midst of the storm a "black squall howled low over the ship" (p. 58). While the men are pinned to the deck in the turbulent backwash of the typhoon, "On the black sky the stars, speckled with foam, flashed back at them the evanescent and pale light of a dazzling whiteness born from the black turmoil of the waves" (p. 77). When the storm has subsided and the winds

calmed, the "Narcissus" sails northward, "rapid and white" (p. 99).

James Wait is often set in a frame of black and white. The cabin in which he has confined himself is described: "The little place, repainted white, had, in the night, the brilliance of a silver shrine where a black idol, reclining stiffly under a blanket, blinked its weary eyes and received our homage" (p. 105). In this respect, it is important that when the cook first sees Wait, he says, "'I thought I had seen the devil'" (p. 19); and in his fanatical hysteria in Wait's cabin, the cook feels anxiety "for the soul of that black man," and wishes to "snatch him up in his arms and pitch him right into the middle of salvation. . . . The black soul--blacker--body--rot--Devil" (p. 115). The precise nature of the influence which Wait holds over the crew is rarely seen exactly; it is abnormal, a profound fear: ". . . a black mist emanated from him; a subtle and dismal influence; something cold and gloomy that floated out and settled on all the faces like a mourning veil" (p. 34). Donkin, watching the Negro die, sees him "long, lean, dried up, as though all his flesh had shrivelled on his bones in the heat of a white furnace" (p. 148). Wait's last words are a plea to Donkin: "'Light . . . the lamp . . . and go'" (p. 154). The atmosphere of death and darkness is repeated when Donkin leaves the cabin and stands watching "on the lighted deck shapeless dark mounds that had the appearance of neglected graves" (p. 155). And finally, after the burial at sea, the ship enters the Channel and home: "Under white wings she skimmed

low over the blue sea like a great tired bird speeding to its nest," and sails under clouds "enormous and white" (p. 161), purged of the malignant darkness.

The black and white, light and darkness, contrast is used in some of the other novels, although never with the extended consistency it has in The Nigger of the "Narcissus." In Victory there seems to be such an attempt with the coal-diamonds paradox. On the opening page of the novel, Conrad points out the close chemical relationship between the two and concludes the paragraph, "And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst--Axel Heyst--from going away from the Tropical Belt Coal Company" (p. 3). The dichotomy set up in Heyst--the dualism of practicality (coal) and mysticism (diamonds)--is only vaguely alluded to further in the novel. Davidson catches a view of Heyst: "Then, while steaming across the slight indentation which for a time was known officially as Black Diamond Bay, he made out with his glass the white figure on the coaling wharf. It could be no one but Heyst" (p. 28). Enough is not made of the associations for any important symbolic overtones.

However, at the close of Victory, just before the violent tragic climax, a repeated point is made of Lena's being dressed in black, "all black in the desolation of a mourning sinner" (p. 373), and "She was dressed in black" (p. 394); whereas her customary costume had previously been white. The remarkable scene which follows carries on the contrast. Jones and Heyst, peering from the blackness of the tropical night, see

Lena "as if enthroned, with her hands on the arms of the chair. She was in black; her face was white, her head dreamily inclined on her breast" (p. 391). They look more closely.

Everything--the bungalow, the forest, the open ground--trembled incessantly; the earth, the sky itself, shivered all the time, and the only thing immovable in the shuddering universe was the interior of the lighted room and the woman in black sitting in the light of the eight candle flames. They flung around her an intolerable brilliance which hurt his eyes, seemed to sear his very brain with the radiation of infernal heat. It was some time before his scorched eyes made out Ricardo seated on the floor at some little distance, his back to the doorway, but only partly so; one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all-forgetful rapture of his contemplation (p. 393).

After Lena has been shot, she speaks to Heyst "as when the sun breaks through a mist" (p. 403). And Heyst examines the wound, "the little black hole made by Mr. Jones's bullet under the swelling breast of a dazzling and as it were sacred whiteness" (p. 405).

The symbolism is somewhat akin to that of James Wait in The Nigger of the "Narcissus." Although Lena is by no means a malignant evil, diseased or even tainted by the mystery of Wait, she is a Magdalen (p. 88), and it is through the evil, or reality, which she inadvertently causes Heyst--Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro--that Heyst achieves his expiation, his "victory." The Swedish hermit would have remained isolated from the necessary reality of life had he not intervened in it by saving Lena. While a "black mist" emanates from Wait, around Lena there is a "white mist which wrapped the promptings and longings of her soul" (p. 399). The image of Lena

surrounded by the burning candles and being worshipped by the savage Ricardo is very much like that of Wait, the "black idol" and his base courtiers. It is difficult to think of the gentle Lena as being evil in the usual sense of the world, but it is through her pretended alliance with the vicious Ricardo, her descent into reality, that she acquires the knife which, for her, is to be the means of saving the powerless Heyst. Black is, for Conrad, not just stark evil but also mystery, the violent but necessary chaos of human experience. Also, after she has made her sacrifice, immersed herself wholly in the destructive element, Lena is purified, white; and so Heyst, who, with Lena's body, dies in the fire. Davidson later relates, "Fire purifies everything" (p. 410).

In the closing scene of The Arrow of Gold, in which Rita carries on the strange conversation with her mad cousin from the darkened room while George listens, there is an echo of the religious quality of Lena's darkness. "There was no other light in the room but the darkened glow of the embers and I could hardly make out amongst the shadows of furniture Dona Rita sunk on her knees in a penitential and despairing attitude" (p. 317). And the mad Ortega tells her, "'You are more fit to be Satan's wife but I won't mind'" (p. 318); he describes her as having "'pure cheeks like a carved saint'" (p. 316). Although Rita is "white in the flush of the dark red glow" (p. 319), later she is "all dark in the fading glow" (p. 321). The strange half-lit violence of the scene serves to unite at last George and Rita, primarily as a result

of the revelation, the humanizing of Rita, which Ortega causes.

In Chance, during the poisoning scene, the two principals in the novel are described: ". . . Captain Anthony, swarthy as an African, by the side of Flora whiter than the lilies . . ." (p. 427). The image is, as Wiley points out,⁵ undoubtedly an echo of Othello; it is also a recurrence of the same color symbolism. Captain Anthony performs somewhat the same function for Flora as does Lena for Heyst in Victory; he is the experience, partially involved in the death of Flora's father, which cleanses Flora, brings her into the world of reality. (Also, like Lena, Flora is, before the climax, "the perversely tempting, sorrowful wisp of white mist drifting in the complicated bad dream of existence" (p. 442).)

Another color which seemingly plays a consistent symbolic role in the novels is red, usually with its conventional associations of violence and blood. In Victory, this color is noted first in the "dull red glow" of the volcano, "expanding and collapsing spasmodically like the end of a gigantic cigar puffed at intermittently in the dark" (p. 4). In the prelude to the violent eruption which closes the novel, Heyst looks at the sky: "Beyond the headland of Diamond Bay, lying black on a purple sea, great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open wound zigzagged between them, with a piece of dark

⁵Wiley, p. 149.

red sun showing at the bottom." And Heyst remarks, "The clouds generally gather around the volcano" (p. 355). Some of the effectiveness is lost, for Conrad speaks, right afterwards, of the "ill-omened chaos of the sky" (p. 355), and Lena says, "'That does not look much like a sign of mercy'" (p. 355). However, the redness is a foreshadowing of the action to come.

Red (or possibly an intense white) is seen through fire in The Nigger of the "Narcissus"; in this scene it becomes a symbol of the purification the ship has undergone from the typhoon. The "Narcissus" is becalmed after the storm.

At night, through the impenetrable darkness of earth and heaven, broad sheets of flame waved noiselessly; and for half a second the becalmed craft stood out with its masts and rigging, with every sail and every rope distinct and black in the centre of a fiery outburst, like a charred ship enclosed in a globe of fire (p. 104).

The association of red and blood is thematic in The Rover. Arlette, finally unburdening herself of the horrors of the Toulon massacre, tells the village priest, "'The wine, the pavements, the arms and faces, everything was red. I had red splashes all over me. I had to run with them all day, and all the time I felt as if I were falling down, and down, and down" (p. 154). When Peyrol examines the tartane, the same one which brought Scevola and Arlette from the nightmare of blood at Toulon, he sees "the stains and splashes which had been untouched by sunlight for years" (p. 87). The tartane is outfitted and purged of its blood by the labors and honest devotion of old Peyrol and is the agent which, indirectly, also cleanses Arlette of her bloody past by

carrying Peyrol to his heroic sacrifice.

Although the silver in Nostromo is not used, strictly speaking, as a color, the metal is a dominant motif in the novel, so much so that it is a very important theme.⁶ The vast panorama of revolution, the complex interweaving of plot, is all built around the mountain of silver that is the San Tomé mine. Every character in the novel is touched by the silver, usually cursed by it. Hirsch, Sotillo, Decoud, and Nostromo all die as a result of its taint.

Decoud, the Parisian intellectual whose only real stake in the revolution is his love of Antonia, who seemingly is untouched by the curse of the metal, kills himself because he is unable to stand the solitary vigil over the treasure. Placing some ingots into his pocket, he shoots himself and "the brilliant Don Martin Decoud, weighted by the bars of San Tomé silver, disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things" (p. 501).

The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, the incorruptible Nostromo, flaunts the corruption of the metal by decorating himself with it while he is at his height as a hero of the town. He rides a silver-grey mare and wears a "grey sombrero with a silver cord and tassels";

The bright colours of a Mexican serape twisted on the cantle, the enormous silver buttons on the embroidered leather jacket, the row of tiny silver buttons down the seam of his trousers . . . the silver plates on headstall and saddle, proclaimed the unapproachable style of the famous Capataz de Cargadores . . . (p. 125).

⁶Winifred Lynskey, "The Role of The Silver in Nostromo," Modern Fiction Studies, I (February, 1955), 16-21.

But he too is killed by the silver; ironically he is accidentally shot by old Viola, who mistakes him for a ne'er-do-well; and he is shot while he visits his forbidden treasure of silver ingots. Just before he dies, Nostromo tells Mrs. Gould, "'The silver has killed me'" (p. 559).

To trace all of the significant threads of meaning carried by the silver would mean a thorough analysis of the longest of the novels, and since its use is so much a conscious carrying out of the theme, such an analysis is not entirely germane to symbolic function. The use of silver or gold is conventional for material wealth, so much so that much of its meaning is explicit.

There are other colors used in the novels as a force for symbolic meaning, but none so consistently or so clearly as those mentioned. As we have seen with Crane, the colors in Conrad are usually associated with their conventional symbolic meaning; it is the way in which they are interwoven in the texture of the novels which provides the added depths of meaning. Since Conrad's whole approach to his material is basically a visual one, it is to be expected that he would make a frequent use of color for visual effect, and quite probably the symbolism comes inherently from the intensity to which Conrad subjected the experience of his novels. There are other kinds of symbols in the novels perhaps as important. One of these is the character as symbol.

It is necessary to repeat that if a character is to be regarded as a symbol, and echo of the theme, he must also be a living reality, for if he exists on the symbolic plane alone,

he lacks force and the novel is perilously close to parable or even allegory. The characters in Conrad's works, whatever other fault they may possess, are nearly always convincing realistically. Therefore any symbolic function they possess is inherent--that is, as a general rule. Perhaps the best way of illustrating this is to look closely again at one novel, that intensely symbolic work, The Nigger of the "Narcissus."

The use of color only enforces a pervading symbolism of which it is a part, a symbolism often seen in terms of character. The crew of the ship is usually always presented as a body, a moving, living mass of Cranelike forces, a community of men. But several of the important individual members of the crew are carefully delineated: Little Belfast, Donkin, the cook, Singleton, Charley, Archie, Lane Knowles, Wamibo. Some of these exist on a purely realistic level, seamen and members of the community, but others are symbolically important in addition to their function in the external action of the novel. Perhaps the most important of these is the vicious and evil Cockney, Donkin. He is a castoff, not even a seaman, but like Jones and Gentleman Brown a malcontent,⁷ consumed by a feverish energy to destroy, an embodiment of unprincipled evil for whom Conrad spares no contempt. But there are more important aspects of his character.

Donkin alone, out of all of the crew, reaches an affinity

⁷It is interesting that Donkin, like Jones, is tainted with homosexuality; at the one point in the novel at which the sailors talk of girls, "Donkin looked severe and disgusted" (p. 109).

with Wait, and it is to him only that Wait is in any sense of the word friendly. The "nigger" rejects with contempt the weak humanitarianism and sacrifice of everyone else in the crew, including the devotion of Little Belfast, but accepts the sneers of the Cockney. Both understand each other perfectly. Donkin accuses Wait of malingering--"'Yer ain't sick--are yer?'" (p. 111)--and Wait admits it because in his fear he must believe it. The Negro calls Donkin a "jail prop" and he agrees with pride (p. 111). Wait's kinship even reaches the extent of his offering two hoarded biscuits to Donkin, who reacts by eating one and throwing the other contemptuously at Wait.

While these two share the same basic nature, they differ in important respects. Wait is incapable of action; even though he is the dark root of all of the trouble on the ship, he is passive and it is his presence which spreads his evil. Donkin must act, and he does so with cunning intelligence, constantly prowling and sowing the seeds of violence. He arrives on board the "Narcissus" with nothing, "'not a bloomin' rag but what I stand in'" (p. 12), and at port, in the Board of Trade office as the crew is being paid off, Donkin has prospered: "He had better clothes, had an easy air, appeared more at home than any of us" (p. 169). Donkin is a craven and predatory bird, eager to pounce on the frightened Negro, and he is often described in such terms: ". . . his shoulders were peaked and drooped like the broken wings of a bird . . ." (p. 10); ". . . and hanging a peaked nose,

resembled a sick vulture with ruffled plumes" (p. 128);

"... flourishing a hand hard and fleshless like the claw of a snipe" (p. 105); it is Wait who perceives this quality most clearly:

"You're like a poll-parrot, like a screechin' poll-parrot." Donkin stopped and cocked his head attentively on one side. His big ears stood out, transparent and veined, resembling the thin wings of a bat.

"Yuss?" he said, with his back towards Jimmy.

"Yes! Chatter out all you know--like ...like a dirty white cockatoo" (p. 110).

Donkin stands watch, waiting for Jimmy to die, taunting him with the nameless fear that drives the Negro to his death, and he approaches the dying man, "stretching his neck out with distrustful curiosity" (p. 151). Immediately after Jimmy is dead, Donkin plunders the chest and leaves the cabin.

It is difficult to unravel the complexity of meaning associated with the Negro because by his very nature he is vague, an ominous and diseased presence which infects the ship with "a heavy atmosphere of oppressive quietude" (p. 138). His greatest emotion is his violent, unreasonable fear of death, the inevitable, chaotic darkness which clings to him: "... he seems to shout his denials already from beyond the awful border" (p. 139). The two members of the crew who tell Jimmy directly that he is dying--Donkin and the cook--throw him into pitiful hysteria; it is Donkin's taunt, "'Feet furst, through a port ...Splash! Never see yer any more. Overboard! Good 'nuff fer yer'" (p. 153), which finally drives him into the "unspeakable horrors" (p. 153) which, for him, are death.

The fear holds him even after his death, for his body refuses to slide into the sea: ". . . he yet seemed to cling to the ship with the grip of an undying fear" (p. 159).

It is this fear which gives Wait his strange power over the crew: "Through him we were becoming highly humanised, tender, complex, excessively decadent . . . as though we had been overcivilized, and rotten, and without any knowlege of the meaning of life" (p. 139).

The humanization takes various forms. Little Belfast, who previously had been light-hearted, belligerent but comical, through his devotion to Wait, becomes "irritable, explosive as gunpowder, sombre, suspicious, and never more brutal than when most sorrowful" (p. 140). He alone carries the reality of Jimmy's death after arriving safely home, but the narrator, purged of the darkness like the crew, brushes him aside:

". . . I wasn't anxious to stand the brunt of his unconsolable sorrow" (p. 171). Archie refuses to play his concertina any more (p. 36), and all song and merriment on the ship ceases until Wait and his influence have been cleansed from it. The Negro manipulates his influence carefully, frequently referring to himself as a dying man, complaining bitterly about the food, the noise of the crew, until everyone feels like "the base courtiers of a hated prince" (p. 37).

It is only Singleton (and Donkin in a different way) who is unaffected by the infernal spell, he with the gleaming white skin who "steered with care" (p. 89); "With his spectacles and a venerable white beard, he resembled a learned and savage

patriarch, the incarnation of barbarian wisdom serene in the blasphemous turmoil of the world" (p. 6). The old seaman painfully spells his way through the "polished and curiously insincere sentences" (p. 6) of Bulwer Lytton and is unable to sign his name to the payroll, but, like the prophet he resembles, he foresees that Wait will die in sight of land, and it is the thirty-hour stretch at the wheel which Singleton makes that saves the "Narcissus" through the violence of the storm.

The "Narcissus" itself is spoken of in microcosmic terms: a "fragment detached from the earth . . . like a small planet" (p. 29), a "minute world" (p. 31), and "Our little world went on its curved and unswerving path carrying a discontented and aspiring population" (p. 103). The members of the crew are the inhabitants of this world, moving and thinking as a group until the closing scene when the "pilgrimage" is over and they separate as individuals.

The pilgrimage theme is the basic pattern in the novel and it is this theme which is largely carried by the complex symbolism. Into the world of the "Narcissus" comes James Wait, a black, diseased fear, unknowable and thus more fearful, sowing dissension and violence. He is equated with the devil, a "black idol," the prince of darkness, the tortured and dark areas of experience through which all men must pass to arrive at certainty. Only Donkin and Singleton are unaffected by this fear: Donkin because he is unmitigated, knowing evil, shrewd and yet inhuman: Singleton because he

is simple, "single," in the sense of his one-minded devotion to the basic values of his world. At the end of the voyage, the ship and the crew are "purified"; they are in the world of concrete reality, the brick walls of the dock buildings, the tugs, and the pay table; they have been freed from the vague and evil mystery of the "nigger." The crew has learned the lesson expressed so well by Stein in Lord Jim: "In the destructive element immerse . . ." (p. 214).

The trio of evil in Victory, Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro, are also much more than just three unscrupulous adventurers. In the novel they are best described by Heyst: "' . . . evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back'" (p. 329). They are an extension of the same sort of powers which interested Conrad so much in The Nigger of the "Narcissus": the complex faces of evil. More space is spent on the three murderers in the novel than simple characterization would seem to justify, although, with the possible exception of the wild alligator hunter, Pedro, none of the three has a simple nature.

Pedro, the brute force, is only a shade above an animal, and every time he appears in the novel it is as an animal. He is a "nondescript, hairy creature . . .";

the lower part of his physiognomy was over-developed; his narrow and low forehead, unintelligently furrowed by horizontal wrinkles, surmounted wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with wide, baboon-like nostrils. . . . Grasping the gunwale of the launch, he displayed a pair of remarkably long arms, terminated in thick, brown hairy paws of simian aspect (p. 99).

Pedro is completely devoted to and dependent upon Jones; he

is a "performing bear" (p. 102), unable to think for himself and to act except with animal urges. He has great strength and is the power of the trio.

The "instinctive savagery" is Ricardo, the "secretary," also devoted to Jones, and, like Donkin, restless and cunning. Although he protests, "'I am a man who's following a gentleman'" (p. 146), he is a "rather nasty, slow-moving cat" (p. 118), and always seen as such. When he is angry he shows his teeth (p. 117), his eyes gleam phosphorescent (p. 123), and when Schomberg pours the soft drink for him, he shows "oblique, coyly expectant yellow eyes, like a cat watching the preparation of a saucer of milk; and the satisfied sound after he had drunk might have been a slightly modified form of purring, very soft and deep in his throat" (p. 147). Like a cat, he has fangs, the knife he keeps constantly strapped to his leg. Ricardo states, "'I have no feelings'" (p. 133), and, aside from his wild, momentary lust for Lena (which is cat-like), he shows feeling for Jones only, who is a "gentleman." Even the shallow Schomberg is horrified at Ricardo's cannibalistic description of his tobacco habits: "'... I couldn't be happy unless I had a lump as big as a baby's fist in my cheek'" (p. 138). Ricardo is shown with more than a hint of sadism. His evil energy must always be controlled by the rational Jones. Significantly, Ricardo's decision to operate alone, to think for himself without telling Jones his plan, is the cause of failure and death for the three.

In many ways Jones is the most interesting of the three.

No one of Conrad's other "villains," and not many in the English novel, is as wholly evil or as diabolically vicious. He is obviously homosexual, with his delicate fussiness, his "proper way of doing things" (p. 137), his abhorrence of violence, his abnormal slimness and his "delicate and beautifully pencilled eyebrows" (p. 111). He has an insane horror of women (p. 102) which erupts when he sees Ricardo adoring Lena and results indirectly in Lena's death. Although he has no illusions about morality (he is, like Heyst, a nihilist), he is always reasonable and aware of his actions, preferring to think of himself as "a gentleman looking on all this with the privileged detachment of a cultivated mind, of an elevated personality" (p. 269). He rarely acts, but directs, and with a keen intelligence. Schomberg sees Ricardo and Jones as being well-matched "in their enormous dissimilarity, identical souls in different disguises" (p. 130).

Heyst is powerless in the face of the threefold evil of the murderers because he is bound by his fatalism. He gives them water (p. 229), nourishing them, and because he, through his father, sees man as "an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation" (p. 196), he is unable to fully recognize the intentions of Jones and his henchmen. Ironically, it is when Heyst ceases to be a hermit, a solitary exile, and mingles with life, releasing his natural human feelings, that he suffers catastrophe (and gains knowledge). Lena in her simple piety and "delicacy in the perception of inhuman evil" (p. 207) does see the danger and acts against it, sacrificing herself for the "victory." The three, "a spectre, a cat, an

ape" (p. 148), have few human feelings, emotions (except fear and hatred), or normal passions. Jones regards the planned robbery of Heyst as a "test" (p. 335), the matching of his personality against that of Heyst. When he fails the test, not so much as a result of Heyst's strength but of Lena's, and drowns in the harbor, he is found in the water "huddled up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out" (p. 411).

Ricardo, Jones, and Pedro in Victory then are further examples of Conrad's defining evil through characters which are symbolic representations of its various facets. While it is true, as Wiley says, that "Conrad drew his villains black, not primarily for melodramatic effect but because he intended them to embody moral evil so plainly that they could be distinguished from the fully human characters in his later tales,"⁸ the statement needs to be qualified. The villains are not wholly "black" in the sense that they are without shades, but are delineations of kinds of villainy, some of the many faces of evil. Donkin and Ricardo are animal-like and cunning; they act instinctively, from a very vital part of their nature and could be nothing but what they are. Jones, on the other hand, has directed his powers of reasoning and his intelligence to evil and is all the more deadly because he can be objective. He does not act instinctively but from carefully made plans; his is an evil directed by

⁸Wiley, pp. 147-48.

intelligence and not instinct. Pedro (and Nikita in Under Western Eyes) is nothing but brute strength to be manipulated by those with intelligence and will. The most mysterious of these manifestations of evil is James Wait, who is just a presence, an inactive, brooding darkness which never acts but is always casting its malevolent shadow--almost as though his powers for evil were beyond any external control.⁹

It would also be an error to assume a dichotomy between characters who embody moral evil plainly and "fully human characters," for although those "villains" mentioned above are clearly symbolic, they are also living human characters realistically. As a matter of fact, there is a temptation for the reader to fall into a Satanic fallacy and feel that the morally evil characters--at least in The Nigger of the "Narcissus," and Victory--are the most real of those in the novels. This is so because they have such hard, concrete, "visual" characteristics: Jones and his femininity, Ricardo the "cat," and Pedro the "performing bear," Wait and his color, Donkin and his harsh, Cockney, evil vitality. It is also for this reason that the characters are successful symbolically.

Although not of particular importance, in connection with the character symbol there should be a mention of Conrad's use of names. Wright makes a passing reference to Conrad's

⁹There are, of course, other "villains" in the novels--Gentleman Brown (Lord Jim), Ortega (The Arrow of Gold), Scevola (The Rover), Ossipon and the Professor (The Secret Agent), De Barral (Chance); but for the most part these are caricatures of revolutionaries or function on a realistic level with only a few symbolic overtones.

tendency for symbolical names;¹⁰ and there is no doubt that many of Conrad's characters seem labelled for other than functional purposes. It is dangerous to assume too much significance to this device because it is possible to read much where there may be nothing, but definite trends can be noticed. For example, the names Anthony and Flora in Chance have considerable suggestiveness. Anthony is spoken of early in the novel as being "hermit-like" (p. 223), and his existence is clearly barren and like the life of the Christian anchorite until he meets Flora, who, almost too conveniently, blooms into a happy, contented woman after the emptiness of her early life. In the same novel, the malignant De Barral becomes, on board the Ferndale (also suggestive), the anonymous Mr. Smith, and, like two other of Conrad's villains--Jones and Brown--becomes a universalized kind of evil.

Still another dark shade, Scevola, the half-mad and fanatic revolutionary of The Rover, has a name as well as a temperament not unlike Savonarola. Wait's name, in The Nigger of the "Narcissus," is possibly symbolic of the suspension of activity he causes on the ship. At least the mate of the ship makes the same confusion when Wait first appears on board (p. 17). The "Narcissus" itself is clearly a mirror of man, a microcosm. In Nostromo, the name of the Capataz de Cargadores, which Signora Teresa describes as a "name that is properly no word" (p. 23), might mean "Our Man," since

¹⁰Walter F. Wright, Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1949), p. 18.

Nostromo is certainly a hero to the common people of the town. In the same novel there is the American capitalist of mysteriously powerful resources and a devotion to the "purer forms of Christianity" (p. 80) whose name, Holroyd, might well be an ironic corruption of "holy rood." Lena, in Victory, is spoken of as Magdalen (p. 88), and she performs much the same office for Heyst as does her Biblical counterpart. Before his becoming an informer, Razumov (Under Western Eyes) attempts to live in the pure light of reason; ironically his name is a form of the Russian word for "reason," razum. There are other names--ships, places, characters--which are suggestive but not of enough importance to draw conclusions from.

There is in the novels--particularly in the early ones--a great use of natural description, for atmospheric effect and at times for symbolic effect. Wiley has marked the use of wilderness as a symbol of "a state of removal from the theater of normal and collective life, often represented by the open sea, and thus a field for abnormal experience."¹¹ This appears in many of the novels but more often in the exotic tropical jungles of the Malaysian books. Other natural phenomena seem to carry overtones of symbolism, particularly one of Conrad's favorites, the thunderstorm.

As would be expected, the thunderstorm is used as a parallel to violence; with some variation, it builds up with the tension of the characters and explodes with the violent

¹¹Wiley, pp. 27-28.

climax of the scene, providing an echo to the internal turmoil in the actors. Among the novels there are important thunderstorms or unusual weather disturbances in Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The Nigger of the "Narcissus", Lord Jim, Victory, and The Rover.

Early in Almayer's Folly, as a prelude to the destruction of Almayer's dreams, there is a foreshadowing rumble of an approaching storm (p. 19), and a violent storm breaks after Dain's interview with Lakamba (p. 85). When Almayer finds his daughter with the half-caste, Dain, "small clouds--precursors of the storm--crossed the face of the moon . . ." (p. 176). As Almayer pleads with Nina to return, "the reflection of a distant flash of lightning lit up the clouds over their heads, and was followed after a short interval by rumble of thunder, which mingled with Almayer's voice as he began to speak" (p. 177). In the "great stillness before the bursting out of the thunderstorm" (p. 185), the Dutch arrive in the cove pursuing Dain.

The thunderstorm is used in An Outcast of The Islands in very much the same way. The crucial scene in the novel is the one in which Lingard confronts Willems as an avenging angel. The meeting is set with an overture of an approaching storm (p. 241). Willems walks to meet Lingard and he senses "the silence of the world collecting its faculties to withstand the storm" (p. 257). Willems pleads with Lingard to save him, rejects Aissa, and screams, "'I am white! All white!'" and "as soon as it [his voice] had ceased

the thunder seemed to take up the burden in a low growl coming from the inland hills" (p. 271). The coming storm grows in intensity and finally breaks with a deluge which rushes down on Willems as Lingard leaves him in scorn (p. 283).

The purgation brought by the typhoon in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" has been discussed before. After Jim has finished his long confession to Marlow in Lord Jim, the monsoons break; the rain in the water-pipe outside "performed a parody of blubbering woe with funny sobs and gurgling lamentations" (p. 178), as an echo to the self-pity in Jim's mind.

A slightly different use of the storm is in Victory. It begins as Ricardo and Jones make ready to act against Heyst and Lena. Heyst observes to Ricardo, as they approach the bungalow, "It may be nothing in the end"; Ricardo answers, "No! Let it come! . . . I am in the humour for it" (p. 374). But the storm never really breaks; it hovers on the horizon, muttering dangerously (p. 378), and its flickers of lightning bring into sharp relief Lena surrounded by her candles (p. 391). Apparently the storm remains a threat, for after Davidson's arrival, the sky has cleared.

The general atmosphere of The Rover is clean, pure light, the clear, bright light of the French Mediterranean coast, but the sky clouds with approaching violence towards the close of the novel as Peyrol and Michel prepare the tartane for its game of hide and seek with the British fleet: "Over the pool a little ragged cloud torn from the purple robe of the storm floated, arrested and thin like a bit of dark gauze" (p. 243). The storm breaks with Arlette's struggle

with Peyrol just before the tartane sets sail, "as if this had been the beginning of a destroying and universal deluge--the end of all things" (p. 248). The rain stops and a strong breeze replaces the storm as the old rover casts off on his mission of sacrifice (p. 251).

Several other recurrent objects and imagery which sometimes suggest symbolical implications thread through the novels. Among these is the curtain of Almayer's Folly, Victory, and Chance.

In Almayer's Folly, the curtain is a red one, separating the women's quarters from the veranda where the trader conducts much of his business. Both Nina and Almayer's wife often listen behind the curtain to events taking place on the veranda (p. 44). The curtain, fluttering while the women listen, is a vague indication of their living presence. After Nina has fled with Dain, the broken and embittered Almayer returns to his bungalow. "He went over to the doorway where the red curtain hung down in motionless folds, and hesitated for a moment before pushing it aside with his shoulder as if breaking down some solid obstacle" (p. 198). He finds in the room only desolation and bitter memories.

Lena's bedroom, in Victory, is separated from the rest of the bungalow by a curtain, a barrier which Heyst is apparently unable to break because of his self-imposed exile from the vital centers of human feeling. Ricardo, however, thrusts it rudely aside in his attack on Lena: "Ricardo charged, head down, straight at the curtain. The stuff, tossed up violently by his rush, settled itself with a slow,

floating descent into vertical folds, motionless, without a shudder even, in the still, warm air" (p. 289). It is only after Lena has been shot, when Heyst has learned that his negation of humanity is impossible, that he is able to tear down the separation. He runs to the room after placing Lena on the bed, "tearing down with a furious jerk the curtain that swung stupidly in his way" (p. 404). Although Conrad would most undoubtedly have denied it, the image is highly sexual.

Again, in Chance, there is a distinctive curtain, this time a pair of heavy curtains in Captain Anthony's cabin which cuts off the "most private part of the saloon, consecrated to the exclusiveness of Captain Anthony's married life" (p. 410) from the rest of the cabin. The curtains are of heavy stuff (p. 415) and form a solid wall across the room. As young Powell watches from the deck, through the skylight and into the "consecrated" part of the cabin, the curtains tremble with movement, and the white wrist and freckled hand of the evil De Barral breaks through the curtains and drops a poison into Captain Anthony's glass (p. 417). The symbolism is obvious. It is the ex-convict father of Flora, the mysterious De Barral, who keeps the marriage of Flora and Anthony from achieving the felicity it should find, even to the violation of the sanctity of the union with poison. Only after De Barral, in a last desperate move, drinks the poison himself, is the pall removed and Flora and Anthony united.

Among other possible symbols of interest in the novels is the stone, catalepsy imagery which, as Wiley notes, may

"represent life frozen through a decline in human feeling."¹² This is often seen as marble sculpture, as in Nostramo (p.48), or the cataleptic states so commonly described in The Secret Agent. In The Arrow of Gold, in the Ortega-Rita-George scene noted above, there is this description of Rita as she tries to stop George from listening to the mad Ortega and the revelation which brings the two together: "In the straight, falling folds of the nightdress she looked cold like a block of marble; while I, too, was turned into stone by the terrific clamour in the hall" (p. 320). Closely akin to this and possibly a part of it are the statues which figure in The Arrow of Gold and Under Western Eyes. In the former novel, Allegre's painting of the woman in the hat is made from a dummy clothed in a Byzantine robe (p. 22), a dummy which is a prominent feature of George's apartment and becomes to him symbolic of Rita (p. 240). The silver statuette bearing a sickly gas light at the foot of the stairs in the house on the Street of the Consuls is mentioned several times (pp. 257, 285, 323). Apparently it represents a winged youth and ironically Ortega dies at its foot (p. 323). The two statues in Under Western Eyes are also an underlying irony. The first, the "Flight of Youth," a "quarter-life-size smooth-limbed bronze of an adolescent figure, running" (p. 43), is in the General's room, the setting for Razumov's first informing on Haldin and the beginning of his living death. The second, a

¹²Wiley, p. 104.

bronze effigy of Jean Jacques Rousseau, is on the tiny island in Geneva where the tortured Razumov retires to consider his betrayal of Haldin.

One last interesting device, one which may not be so much symbolic as it is dramatic, can be demonstrated by examining a scene from The Secret Agent. The scene is one of the meetings in the cafe between the opportunist Ossipon and the fanatical Professor. During the conversation, the Professor answers one of Ossipon's questions with a statement which brutally foreshadows the close of the novel: "'Fasten yourself upon the woman for all she's worth'" (p. 78).

Ossipon sits stunned and watches the Professor walk towards the stairs to leave the cafe. And then quite suddenly, from the cafe,

The lonely piano, without as much as a music stool to help it, struck a few chords courageously, and beginning a selection of national airs, played him out at last to the tune of "Blue Bells of Scotland." The painfully detached notes grew faint behind his back while he went slowly upstairs, across the hall, and into the street (p. 79).

The sudden harsh irony is strikingly close to the modern thriller effects of Alfred Hitchcock or Graham Greene: the shock that comes from the sudden intrusion of mundane reality. And of course the dramatic contrast considerably heightens the horror of the scene. Conrad used the same sort of effect in other places: the hand organ in Almayer's Folly (p. 88); the orchestra in Schomberg's hotel in Victory (p. 68); and the bluebottle fly in An Outcast of The Islands (p.181).

It would be possible to find many more symbolic representations or possible ones in the novels, but the result

would be only repetition or intensive analysis of Conrad's recurrent themes. Those aspects of multi-leveled meaning in the novels presented here are perhaps enough to indicate that, whether consciously selected or not, there is a significant and frequent use of symbolic meaning in Conrad's novels, a meaning carried through color, character, names, facets of moral evil, natural description, and specific concrete objects. There is considerable evidence to indicate that Conrad was well aware of such means of conveying meaning: his own statements on the subject, and his not uncommon explicit statement of the relationships in the novels. What is most important of all, however, is that Conrad's vision was such that it intensified the experience of his novels, showed in it a depth of meaning which would be possible only by implication and the necessarily symbolic nature of great art.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE

Percy Lubbock has pointed out quite well the one great obstacle to the critic or reader who wishes to talk in precise terms about the "form" of a novel. "Nothing, no power, will keep a book steady and motionless before us, so that we may have time to examine its shape and design."¹ By the time we have reached the last page the first part of the book has begun to blur in our minds, and after we have finished we have only a group of impressions, a realization of having been moved emotionally or shown insights into a situation; the effect is much like that of living experience, which is real while it happens and only recollection afterwards. It is this esthetic impossibility of holding the whole clearly in our minds--the sometimes forgotten principle that literature exists in time and not space--that leads so often to ambiguity in critical terms, and disagreements about the nature of form and standards of measuring it.

But if we agree that the novel is art, we must grant it form. The novel is much more than a literal transcription of reality because the author selects and arranges his experience into a unique view of reality, in basically the

¹The Craft of Fiction, p. 1.

same way that a painter or composer does. The quality which gives his view of reality its distinction is the way in which he orders and selects the material of his novel, or what we can call his structure. The meanings which a novelist extracts from his subject depend upon the angle from which he views it, the place from which he sees it, the depth to which he goes, and the views he chooses to show us.

In an attempt to arrive at some conclusions about the structure of a novelist's works there are at least two important factors to be considered if the conclusions are to have any critical validity, and if there is to be some agreement upon the meaning of terms. The first of these is to agree that the structure of a novel is inextricably bound with its subject. "The best form is that which makes the most of its subject--there is no other definition of the meaning of form in fiction."² It is impossible to talk of one without talking of the other; we cannot speak of the way in which a novel is put together unless we have some fairly accurate conception of its meaning or meanings. An author's deviations from conventional narrative technique--or that form most commonly used by his predecessors--are either caprice or are intended to further sharpen the meaning of his novel, and only by assuming the latter can much be gained through analysis.

The second important factor to consider in structural analysis is the method and the tools to be used in arriving at the structure of a novel. What is structure and form in

²Ibid., p. 40

narrative fiction and how is it defined? There are relatively few critics, excepting the novelists themselves, who have attempted any extended theoretical analysis of form in the novel. Because of this paucity of any really substantial body of critical theory, there is a need for terminology, nomenclature, which is native to the novel form, as Percy Lubbock also recognizes.³ Instead, terms are borrowed from other arts: "composition," "canvas," "symmetry," "focus," "perspective" from painting; "dramatic," "scenic" from the stage; "theme," "counterpoint," "pitch," "tone," and others from music. Unless one is competent enough to invent a whole new critical vocabulary, it is necessary to use terms which are analogical. The confusion is evident among those who have written about structure in the novel. Edwin Muir treats structure largely in terms of plot, or the chain of events in a novel--"what" happened, instead of "how" it happened.⁴ E. M. Forster would ignore any artificial rules of form; he demands only that a novel contain the essence of "life."⁵ Joseph Warren Beach⁶ and Carl Grabo⁷ have traced historically the influence of certain separate devices, but neither formulates any functional body of theory which will

³Ibid., p. 21.

⁴The Structure of the Novel (London: Hogarth Press, 1946).

⁵Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927).

⁶The Twentieth Century Novel.

⁷The Technique of the Novel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928).

provide a basis for further study. There is a multitude of studies of single novelists which avoid the central problems of form and terminology.

However, one concept has emerged which seems to offer much possible value for the study of structure in the novel, point of view, or as it is variously termed, "focus," or "post of observation." The concept has its clearest development in the work of Henry James. Although it was long a recognized critical principle before him, it was rarely exploited as the key concept in structure until James' essays and prefaces. Ford Madox Ford was certainly aware of it, and focus, as we have seen earlier, was central to the theory of the novel held by the Impressionists. Percy Lubbock bases his whole view of fictional techniques upon point of view, as do those "disciples" of James who followed in his footsteps most closely, Ellen Glasgow⁸ and Edith Wharton.⁹ This approach to structure is nearly always accepted as significant among contemporary critics who treat of structure, although there is some confusion about its meaning. Joseph Warren Beach has said that, "In a bird's eye view of the English novel from Fielding to Ford, the one thing that will impress you more than any other is the disappearance of the author."¹⁰ Because the author's position and his focus is so essential to the study of the

⁸A Certain Measure (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1943).

⁹The Writing of Fiction (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925).

¹⁰The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 14.

development of structure in Conrad's novels it is helpful to establish some clarification of this concept.¹¹

1. Point of view

Point of view in the novel is the term applied to the consciousness through which the material of the novel is presented. It answers the questions of how the story purports to exist and who talks to the reader: it is the method by which the novelist bridges the gap between the "stuff" of the story and the readers. The reality of any given situation will differ in many ways depending upon the sensibility, ethical position, distance, and circumstances of the mind which views it, and so it is with the material of a novel. The novelist must choose a point of view, a sensibility, through which the events of the novel are presented to the reader, and when this point of view is isolated, it is often possible for the critic to come to some valid conclusions about the way in which the complete work has been built and the reasons for this structure. There is, of course, a great variety of points of view which can be used in the novel, but the major kinds of focuses can be classified into general groups. Even though Conrad did not utilize all of these focuses--although he did employ a surprisingly large number of them--a full explanation is needed because of the way the points of view demonstrate a trend towards author effacement, in itself essential to Conrad's development.

¹¹In the discussion which follows I am indebted for terminology and broad, general outlines of definition to the explanation given by Norman Friedman: "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," PMLA, LXX (December, 1955), 1160-84.

Perhaps the simplest method of bringing a story to listeners or readers is telling it; that is, relating the events and commenting upon them in the same voice, in the way a story-teller might relate a story to a group around a fireplace, interpreting the actions of his characters and keeping his, the narrator's, personality in view of the listeners. This is the point of view common in the traditional English novel; it can be seen in Tom Jones, Vanity Fair, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Adam Bede, and in many others. Thackeray gives an example of it in his address to the readers at the close of Vanity Fair:

This is what he pined after. Here it is--the summit, the end--the last page of the third volume. Goodbye, Colonel. God Bless you, honest William!--Farewell, dear Amelia.¹²

We are well aware that Thackeray is telling us about his characters--even the progress of his writing; he makes no attempt to hide his presence and we are, with Thackeray, completely outside the people he is talking about. This point of view is termed "Editorial Omniscience": "Editorial" because the author speaks in his own voice and person directly to the reader; "Omniscience" because he is on a plane which gives him the right to go into, at any time or depth, the minds and emotions of any of his characters. There is a tendency away from the dramatic, "scenic," presentation because the novelist's presence gets between the reader and the action. The author has no need to project the action dramatically because he, and we, recognize that this is all a tale, a story being

¹²(New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), p. 780.

"told" to us. The illusion of reality, that these things are really happening before our eyes, is not so important as what is happening. Thus the structure of a novel focused this way is often directly chronological, picaresque, or simply a cause-and-effect chain, and oblique and indirect views are rare. Such fine, subtle points as motivation, internal conflict, and tone are difficult from such a focus because we must take the novelist's word for them; he does not give us as much opportunity to judge and select for ourselves since he forces himself between us and the story, and it is his perceptions and feelings which become important. We base our judgments upon what the novelist tells us second-hand and not upon what we see ourselves. This point of view was the one artificiality of technique which most caused the Impressionists to seek new forms; the intruding author destroyed the illusion which they felt was essential to the structure of the novel.

A modification of Editorial Omniscience is "Neutral Omniscience," which differs from the former only in that the author does not intrude directly as the author but speaks impersonally in the third person or through a character. It is of course extremely difficult to draw a line at any given point and say with certainty that this is the author speaking and that the characters, but it is possible to see the point at which an author steps outside the minds of his actors and comments or criticizes their actions. Neutral Omniscience is of importance in Conrad's novels, particularly in those later novels which do not employ an "I" Witness,

because, ignoring fine points, it is his most frequent point of view when he is unable to project dramatically or through a narrator. This point of view is a favorite one for the "novel of ideas," so-called because the characters are primarily projections of philosophical ideas, as in Koestler's Darkness at Noon, Mann's The Magic Mountain, Huxley's Point Counterpoint. This genre is ideally focused this way because the emphasis is upon idea instead of image or inference. An example is in order; this from Thomas Mann, the description of Naptha, the Jesuit antagonist of the humanist Settembrini.

The worldly and superior quality of the ugly stranger's tailoring made him stand nearer to the cousins than to Settembrini; yet it was not only his age which ranged him rather with the latter, but also a quite pronounced something else, most convincingly exemplified by the complexion of the four. For the two younger were brown and burnt, the two elder pale.¹³

Present at the scene are Hans, his cousin, Naptha, and Settembrini; yet the details of Naptha's person are not seen through the eyes of any of the other three; he is seen as Thomas Mann sees him. The focus is necessary because in the novel the appearances of the characters are carefully selected to harmonize with the ideas they represent: Settembrini, the carelessly dressed but easy and affable Italian, is a humanist; Naptha is thin, clean-shaven, and piercing, the rationalist and logician; the two cousins are youthful, not yet worn by time and conflict. These very important details would not be evident through, for example,

¹³The Magic Mountain (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 372.

Castorp's eyes because he would not look for them and lacks the perception to understand their importance. For this reason, the freedom of vision allowed the novelist, the Neutral Omniscient point of view is, generally speaking, the most often used focus in the English novel, at least prior to the current trends toward indirection. There are many refinements of the omniscient author, as we shall see later in Conrad's novels, sometimes reaching the point at which the focus is very objective and impersonal.

Still a further movement away from the intruding author (and of primary importance in Conrad's problems with point of view) is the introduction of a narrator, the "I" who can be either telling someone else's story, as a witness and a participant to a greater or lesser degree in the action, or telling his own story from the center of the action. The narrator is a character from within the story and is of course limited to what he can narrate by his presence at the scene or what has been told him about it. The most obvious advantage of a first person narrator is realism; we usually can accept first hand testimony from a witness more readily than we can a conjectured version of what happened, recognizing of course that this is not the only or necessarily the best way of achieving realism in fiction. Novelists have often exploited the first person point of view for its realistic appeal. Defoe carefully informs the reader of Moll Flanders in both the preface and the subtitle that the book has been "Written from her own Memorandums."¹⁴ This "found" journal

¹⁴ (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), title page.

or diary device is one of the well-worn conventions of narrative fiction, a means of introducing the narrator and making his presence credible.

But while the first person point of view may gain in realism it loses the author's right to peer into the minds of all of his characters, particularly so in the "I" as Witness focus because in the "I" as Protagonist point of view the narrator is of course able to divulge his own thoughts. The "I" Witness device throws the material, and structure, of the novel into an entirely different framework. The reader must either take the narrator's word for the internal states of the other characters, realizing that these depend upon his perceptivity, or draw his own inferences from their actions as the narrator describes them. There are ways of compensating for this loss and of keeping the novel from being entirely on the surface. The narrator may be a compassionate listener, the sort--like Marlow, and Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby--who is the natural person in whom others confide. He can then conjecture about their states of mind. The "I" Witness point of view is a natural one for the novelist who is not at ease in probing into the inner consciousness of his characters. It gives the illusion of removing the author from the responsibility of direct judgment, since it is not he but the narrator who draws conclusions, although the narrator is obviously the novelist's own creation. Because the witness may have received his information in patches and at differing times, this point of view is often effective for purposes of suspense or other structural devices which would otherwise

seem artificial. The narrator may either dramatize his narrative or summarize it, resulting in a convenient means of introducing necessary exposition.

The "I" as Protagonist, or first person telling his own story, loses somewhat in mobility. Whereas the "I" Witness may move about through the story at will, the protagonist who tells his own story is at the center of movement. The novel then becomes the effect of the story upon the narrator. An example of this structure is Huckleberry Finn, which carries the point of view to the extent of not only funneling everything through the narrator's consciousness, but in his own language as well. The only one of Conrad's novels which focuses wholly through an "I" as Protagonist is The Arrow of Gold, and here the focus is qualified by other devices. The structure of such a novel, the selection of what we see and how we are to see it, the interpretation of the events--all of this is balanced completely upon the sensitivity of the narrator. This rigid limitation, which also applies to the "I" Witness point of view, can be an extremely effective device for irony, or what might be considered a "double" focus. The author may create a narrator who is incapable of seeing certain subtleties which are clear to a perceptive reader, or the narrator may misinterpret the events which he does see. Thus we realize that the narrator's version of the events is not the "real" or "right" one, but intentionally distorted, through his focus, for a double effect. A short story by Ring Lardner, "Haircut," is the classic example of this device.

The story is told by a barber, obviously of very limited perceptivity by his language and the views he expresses, and told apparently to the author. The barber tells of a local practical joker who was "a good fella at heart," and who played many clearly unfunny and sadistic jokes on local citizens, one of which--the center of the narrative--resulted in tragedy. But the barber is by nature unable to see the basic evil in the practical joker: "He certainly was a card!"¹⁵ The force of the irony, the point of the story, comes from our knowledge of the pointless brutality of the joker, which the barber, who focuses the story, is unable to see. A form of this device frames Ford Madox Ford's novel The Good Soldier, where it is used, with far more subtlety, for many levels of ironic contrast. Conrad did not make an extensive use of the double focus for irony, but, as will be shown later, he was well aware of its potentialities in Nostramo and Victory.

Two more classifications of point of view remain, these also further movements in the direction away from the author's intrusive presence in the story: Multiple Selective Omniscience and Selective Omniscience. These are important in Conrad's development because he was never really able to use them with great ease and skill; and he was forced to find a substitute for the kind of material they would make available to the reader. In these points of view there is no narrator or author visibly present. The material of the story reaches the reader

¹⁵ Ring Lardner, "Haircut," Round Up (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. 28, 43.

directly through the consciousness of the characters who are part of it; in the former through two or more characters, in the latter through only one. The setting of the novel, the action, the appearances of the characters--all of the material in the novel is focused through the mind or minds of those involved in it. The chief difference between these points of view and that of Neutral Omniscience is that here the material is seen as it is happening, as it passes through the consciousness of the characters (scene), and not summarized after it has happened (narrative). Both points of view have been widely used for minute psychological analysis and "stream of consciousness," as in Henry James and James Joyce. The use of Strether in The Ambassadors as a focus is an example of Selective Omniscience, as is Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. A great many modern novelists have used this point of view, which accounts, in part, for the difficulty, the abruptness and intensity, which are so often associated with contemporary fiction. One of the most skilful users of this point of view is James Joyce:

The wide playgrounds were swarming with boys. All were shouting and the prefects urged them on with strong cries. The evening air was pale and chilly and after every charge and thud of the foot-ballers the greasy leather orb flew like a heavy bird through the grey light. He kept on the fringe of his line, out of sight of his prefect, out of the reach of the rude feet, feigning to run now and then. He felt his body small and weak amid the throng of players and his eyes were weak and watery. ¹⁶

The setting, the playing field, is perceived with sound, color,

¹⁶A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1955), p. 2.

and touch from the consciousness of a young, sensitive boy. He is characterized by the way he sees it and feels himself in relationship to it; his attitudes and values are implied by the view of the scene he has, and all of this we see and feel as it happens, instead of listening to some one tell us about it. This, then, is the goal of dramatic immediacy, of placing the reader in the story, which the various points of view move toward in development. It is, of course, not the only or necessarily the best focus for a novel, but it is one which--as Joseph Warren Beach has said--much contemporary fiction attempts to reach. The huge and bulky didactic novels of the Victorian period were filled with editorial comment and moralizing upon the action because, among other reasons, the great novelists of that era conceived of the novel as a legitimate vehicle for comment as well as for story. Although Conrad used an internal dramatic focus to a limited extent, his novels represent only a transitional stage of development of the method. Ford, who lived to experiment much more, did most definitely reach it in his later novels. It is this Multiple Selective and Selective Omniscience which is the ultimate of what the Impressionists saw as "rendering," and in its pure state, as in James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, it is the inevitable result of a steady progress away from a conscious author and towards a new concept of how a novel should be built.

There is still another classification, one which is not widely used as a point of view in long narrative because it is difficult to sustain for an entire novel. The Dramatic

Mode carries the scenic method to its purest extremes and limits the reader's information almost wholly to what the characters say and do. It is, in effect, almost in play form, requiring the reader to infer any feelings, emotion, or meaning from the external action of the characters, since the material is presented from an almost completely objective point of view. Nostromo is Conrad's most completely dramatic novel--in the sense of external scene--but the entire novel is by no means Dramatic Mode. Hemingway projects his material from the Dramatic Mode often in short stories--"The Killers," "The Big Two-Hearted River"--and in large portions of The Sun Also Rises. It is used also, almost as a tour-de-force, in James' The Awkward Age. Whereas this point of view has great advantages of immediacy and concreteness, it places the strictest limitations on the kind of material a novelist can present.¹⁷

These points of view are not exhaustive; it is possible that two or more may be combined in one novel, as Conrad often does, and the variations of any one of them are many. But by and large they can offer a useful method of seeing one of the most important aspects of the way in which a novel is structured, and the development of a novelist's techniques. There are other parts of the structure, but to a considerable extent, all of these are shaped and determined by the lens

¹⁷Another interesting device to gain the feeling of immediacy is the use of narrative present tense for the traditional narrative past tenses which must always have some effect of action that has already happened; this device is used in Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson, Fearful Joy, and other novels. Conrad attempted it briefly in An Outcast of the Islands, pp. 135-137.

through which they are focused. For this reason it is important to establish the dominant point of view in a novel and arrive at some reasons for its use before we can see what makes up its form.

One of the most striking qualities of point of view in Conrad's novels is his use of a narrator. Although a conventional device in fiction long before Conrad began writing, the narrator in his work is used with greater variation and subtlety than perhaps any other novelist in English literature either before or since. Actually out of the twelve novels being considered in this study only four are almost wholly first person point of view: Chance, Lord Jim, Under Western Eyes, and The Arrow of Gold; and in only one of these, The Arrow of Gold, is the point of view "I" as Protagonist. But in these four novels the material is presented through the narrators with a remarkable richness of distance, position, and meaning. Sections of other novels are fitted into the whole structures, or exposition is inserted, by the use of first person narrators: Mitchell's accounts and Decoud's letter in Nostromo; Davidson and other narrators' frequent interpolations in Victory; Lingard's narration of several incidents he was involved in, and an anonymous narrator who fills in occasionally in The Rescue; and Almayer's long recounting of his sufferings from Willems in An Outcast of the Islands.

The Nigger of the "Narcissus" is a special case because it is presented from a point of view almost unique in the English novel. The story of the novel is told by an "I"

Witness, apparently a member of the crew, but this is not known until page thirty-one, when Conrad slips from Neutral Omniscience into first person plural. The point of view is first person plural from then on in the novel, still by an unidentified member of the crew who is present at the action being described, although there are some curious slips in point of view, until the closing scene, when the narrator becomes singular, an individual, like the rest of the crew, with a separate personality. The slips in point of view detract from an experiment that is so successful its devices are obvious only under close examination. Conrad steps out of the narrator's focus and into the mind of the cook when he shows us the hysterical scene in Wait's cabin; since there are only two present, the cook and Wait, the internal view would have been impossible from a first person telling the story. The same breaks occur in Baker's thoughts (p. 103), the shift to Jimmy Wait's mind (pp. 104, 113), the whole death scene in Wait's cabin at which only Donkin and Wait are present (pp. 144-155), and Donkin's thoughts afterwards. Calling such slips a fault in structure may be hasty, but when the whole focus of the novel, the first person plural, is so effective in bringing the real meaning of the novel--the effect of Wait upon the crew--and when the breaks in focus do not really add to this meaning, they can be said to be weaknesses. In view of Conrad's development of point of view, it is important to remember that The Nigger of the "Narcissus" was published just after the two Malaysian novels, Conrad's third complete novel, and just before the highly developed

experimentation of focus in Lord Jim; and the novel was written before Conrad had any contact with Ford Madox Ford.

There are some interesting differences in the methods by which the narrators are introduced into the story in the four first person novels. Marlow, the enigmatic and sometimes garrulous mariner-story teller who seems to have struck the historians and critics of the English novel as the most interesting--and sometimes only--aspect of Conrad's technique, is the narrator in Lord Jim, and the "frame" narrator in Chance.¹⁸ In both of these he is an "I" witness focus actually participating, to a limited extent, in the story, and in both novels "tells" a considerable part of the novel to a few or several listeners. The teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes who narrates, or rather "interprets" and edits Razumov's journal and narrates, is structurally the same as Marlow: a narrator who also plays some role in the story but whose main function is to focus the story. The use of a "discovered" journal or diary in Under Western Eyes, also the means of explaining the narrator in The Arrow of Gold, is the conventional device, almost hackneyed in the novel, used in both novels in almost exactly the same way Defoe in Moll Flanders and Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter explain the existence of their stories.

In Lord Jim, Marlow does not appear until page thirty-three and then is introduced by the author with sudden abruptness in the middle of a chapter:

¹⁸Marlow is used in works not being considered in this study: "Youth," and "Heart of Darkness."

And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly (p. 33).

From that point on, Marlow takes control, with frequent pauses for breath and to light a cigar, until the closing scenes (p. 337), when an unnamed "privileged" member of Marlow's audience receives a packet, two years after Marlow has apparently concluded his tale, containing a letter from the mariner which closes the story. The talkative Marlow is not placed at a specific place or a specific point in time when he first begins telling the story, for in the paragraph immediately following that previously quoted, Conrad tells us, "Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar ends." But on the next page the setting has become a specific verandah with listeners grouped around Marlow.

The introduction of Marlow is much more skilfully handled in Chance, a novel which has the most complex web of narrators of any of Conrad's other work. The novel opens as Marlow and the vague "I," who is apparently the author and a Boswell to Marlow, strike up an acquaintance with Captain Powell as they are dining in what is presumably a hotel dining room. The opening is seen directly, a specific point in time. Powell then, upon a chance suggestion, begins to tell the other two of his youthful experiences in receiving papers as a mate and going to sea in that capacity on the Ferndale. His narration covers the first chapter of the novel, to page

thirty-four, with occasional interruptions from Marlow-- probably to keep the narrative moving realistically; the narrative is both scenic and summarized. Marlow, who has remembered contacts with some of the people Powell has mentioned, then continues the story, with many switches and other narrators, filling in the blanks which were left by Powell. This brief sketch oversimplifies an extremely complicated variety of points of view, but perhaps is enough to indicate that Marlow is brought into his function in Chance with a good deal more skill and naturalness than he is in Lord Jim, remembering that Chance was published fourteen years later.

In the use of Marlow's literary cousin, the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes, and the anonymous discoverer of George's journal in The Arrow of Gold, there are more similarities than just the journal device, similarities which lead to an interesting aspect of Conrad's structural devices. The point of view differs somewhat in the two novels: the anonymous "editor" of George's journals disappears from the novel until the epilogue and George, from the manuscript, is the "I" Protagonist; the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes is a participant in the story, an "I" Witness as well as "editor." In the framework which introduces the journals in the two novels, both "editors" lament their lack of literary skill. The opening paragraph of Under Western Eyes makes this explicit:

To begin with I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself, after the Russian custom, Cyril son of Isador-- Kirylo Sidorovitch--Razumov (p. 3).

And the protests are repeated at many places throughout the novel. The editor of George's manuscript is not so clear, but in the First Note he apologizes for suppressing sections of the narrative and adding certain factual and historical details which George had neglected. George, the writer of the journals, deprecates his obvious skill with the same ring of insincerity: "Expression on paper has never been my forte" (p. 87). The protests are curious, particularly in view of the fact that the teacher of languages, the editor, and George have a considerable amount of literary skill; either that or the writers of the "discovered" journals are major creative talents. This is of course applying a realistic judgment to what is a conventional literary device, but that (insisting upon the reality) is precisely why the protests are made. Conrad seems to feel that his readers will doubt the authenticity of the frame, that they will realize that highly complex and skilfully written novels do not come by chance from the journals of men who are not novelists by inclination or profession. But even the most casual reader of English novels will recognize immediately that these frames are devices, means of adding credibility to the narrative and introducing the narrator, and all of Conrad's protests notwithstanding, his attempts to bolster the realism, do not make the frame any less obvious as a device; to the contrary, they make it much more clearly an artificial trick to enforce the "trick" of the narrator. The journal-diary is a convention of fiction, part of the attempt--as old as the novel itself--to justify the existence of the story, and as such do not need

any other justification. This ambivalence of structure is one of the major reasons why The Arrow of Gold seems so indecisive, and Under Western Eyes, to quote Crankshaw, like "a brilliant argument founded on false premises."¹⁹

Conrad's awareness of this same problem can be seen also in the way in which he justifies Marlow's appearance in Lord Jim. A common criticism of the novel is that, as Conrad reports in the Preface, "no man could have been expected to talk all that time, and other men to listen so long" (p. vii). And it must be admitted that, in these terms, it is a little difficult to accept one man telling the major part of a 417-page novel at one sitting. Conrad answers the objections in the same spirit with which they were made. He says that in the tropics men have been known to sit up all the night telling tales, that speeches in Parliament have taken as long as six hours, and that refreshments might have been present as Marlow talked. The objection is also indirectly answered in the novel by Marlow's frequent pauses for rest and the concluding of his tale by the packet of letters, the latter having little other structural justification. But both the objection and the answer to it are irrelevant to the point of view used in the novel. Even if we could accept Marlow's long story session, it is obviously impossible for any man, even a sailor with unusual perspicacity, to remember the exact precise little details of setting, shades of voice and expression, the numerous bits of conversation, states of

¹⁹Crankshaw, p. 138.

mind, and even a "teller-of-tales" with Marlow's skill to have such a brilliant grasp of form, such an ornate and rich literary style and insight into human minds--any more so the teacher of languages or George's literary executor. Marlow is, like the others, a device and cannot and should not be justified on purely realistic grounds. Any novel--almost any work of literature--is based upon an illusion; it requires us in Coleridgean terms to suspend reality for a period, although it must of course be realistic, or consistent, within the terms set up by the work itself. It requires no less a suspension of reality to believe a sailor could reconstruct with insight and form the important phases of a young man's life in a period of six or seven hours of talking than it does that an editor could do so from a written document extending over several years. To attempt to justify the devices by standards outside the novel itself is merely stressing their obviousness and artificiality.

This reluctance on Conrad's part to accept artificiality was an important quality in determining the structures of his novels, which becomes more apparent with his use of a narrator than with any other point of view. In Chance, as we have seen, Marlow and the other narrators are introduced in a perfectly natural manner. There are no discovered journals or piles of musty manuscripts; the narrative unfolds by "chance" from a conversation around a dinner table. Yet the structure of Chance is far more subtle, more closely related to the theme, than it is in the other three first person novels. Chance is not necessarily a better novel

than the others; for all its acknowledged complexity of structure it is often dull. But it is, as James described it, "an extraordinary exhibition of method,"²⁰ and it follows Conrad's typical pattern of viewing the subject from as many angles as possible. Yet Chance, as Conrad admits in the preface (p. viii), was the first of his novels to gain real public acceptance, and, although Lord Jim is more popular today, many of even its most perceptive readers are bothered by its structural complexities, complexities which are more evident but not nearly so diversified as those in Chance. If a conclusion can validly be drawn from this, it is that when Conrad was consciously trying to justify his points of view, trying to make them more than just a means of focusing his story, his structures became more unnecessarily complex.

The most central issue in Conrad's use of a narrator has been so far neglected in this discussion, the very important question--and perhaps the most interesting aspect of Conrad's whole method--of why he used a narrator; why he found it necessary to create a Marlow as a focus. Nearly everyone who has attempted a study of Conrad's works has faced the problem of Marlow's existence in some measure. There are those who find him unnecessary: C. K. Allen believes that his presence mars Lord Jim;²¹ and although he feels that Marlow provides "an intense focus," Walter Allen says that Conrad's finest novels are those without Marlow because he is too

²⁰Notes on Novelists, p. 345.

²¹"Joseph Conrad," Contemporary Review, CXXV (1924), 59.

garrulous.²² The greatest confusion is reached when answers to the question of Marlow's function are advanced. A common position is that he is Conrad's mouthpiece, or Conrad's means of avoiding direct commitment, that he is an effort to maintain "the artist's attitude of aloofness, as though the irony and compassion were not Conrad's but Marlow's."²³ Hugh Clifford finds the mariner an "alter ego."²⁴ David Daiches sees him as a device "to come between Conrad and the reader, who can express attitudes and make observations without implicating the author at all"; Marlow is a stand-in for Conrad because "the responsibilities he [Conrad] feels as a man but repudiates as an artist are put on to Marlow's shoulders."²⁵ Two important considerations possibly ignored in this view are that Conrad makes comment often in the novels without the excuse of a narrator, and that Marlow's judgments must be seen in the light of Marlow, who is quite a different person in nature from Conrad (or his biographer's views of him), at least so in the full-length novels.

Other reasons vary considerably. Wilbur Cross does not concern himself with the fine points of Marlow's function and says that he is a convention of the epic tradition and used

²²The English Novel, p. 295.

²³A Literary History of England, p. 1553.

²⁴"The Genius of Mr. Joseph Conrad," North American Review, CLXXVIII, Part II (1904), 842.

²⁵The Novel and the Modern World, pp. 58, 59.

for suspense.²⁶ "Verisimilitude" and "synthesis" are two reasons suggested by Joseph Warren Beach;²⁷ whereas Irving Howe sees the Marlow-like narrator of Under Western Eyes as Conrad's desire to "disassociate himself from his own imagination."²⁸ Marlow is an interpreter who does not understand what he sees, according to E. K. Brown.²⁹ His purpose is not pure realism, says Frances Wentworth Cutler, but a means of providing the "zig-zag" method, the shifting gleams of truth.³⁰ Were Conrad's choice of Marlow and his time shifts "inventions of necessity, concealing an architectonic weakness?" asks Albert Guerard, Jr., and later in his study the same writer finds that Marlow is a means of providing an attitude toward the subject.³¹

The most consistently acceptable view of Conrad's use of the narrator device is that of Edward Crankshaw.³² The narrator is not a device to avoid obstacles, Crankshaw feels, for the obvious reason that Conrad never did this; as a point of fact he created vast technical difficulties through his whole approach to the novel. Marlow was invented simply because he allowed Conrad to do things which he could not do

²⁶"The Illusions of Joseph Conrad," Yale Review, XVII (October, 1927), 470.

²⁷The Twentieth Century Novel, pp. 343, 353.

²⁸"Joseph Conrad: The Political Novels," Kenyon Review, XV (Autumn, 1953), 517.

²⁹"James and Conrad," 271.

³⁰"Why Marlow?" Sewanee Review, XXVI (1918), 28.

³¹Joseph Conrad, pp. 25, 67.

³²Crankshaw, pp. 69-86.

otherwise. Of course the reason, remarkable in its simplicity, requires considerable development, and, in order to do this, it is necessary to begin indirectly by returning to those novels which do not use a narrator primarily and tracing some of Conrad's problems in point of view.

Both Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands are the same in focus. They were both written while Conrad was most directly under the influence of Flaubert; as a matter of fact, as Conrad conveniently explains in A Personal Record (p. 3), the tenth chapter of Almayer's Folly was written while he was docked at Rouen, part of the setting of Madame Bovary and Flaubert's favorite town; and Ford Madox Ford says that the writing of the same novel was begun on the end papers and margins of Conrad's copy of Madame Bovary.³³ Both of Conrad's early novels use a fluctuating point of view; that is, in general the focus is Omniscient, both Selective and Neutral, but quite often he indulges in intense internal analysis. The point of view is an attempt to follow that of Madame Bovary, wherein Flaubert is both outside his characters narrating, and projecting through their eyes dramatically, depending upon the effect he desires. But whereas the points of view are categorically the same, there is a difference in distance. Flaubert fluctuates from Neutral Omniscience to Selective Omniscience and even occasionally uses a first person narrator, but while he is moving from point to point he never loses his esthetic objectivity. In general Flaubert

³³Ford, Joseph Conrad, p. 94.

reveals the story of Emma Bovary detail by detail and as she changes until we have a grasp of her character and await the development of it. But we learn this and adopt our attitude towards Emma from inference, from the embodiment of the attitudes rather than the statement of them. Flaubert may take a position on a high point overlooking the story and describe a landscape, he may move closer to the material and within the consciousness of the characters, or he may see through their eyes with pure objectivity, as he does in the famous comices agricoles scene, but he always stays within the fixed constant he has chosen, and he moves without making his shift noticeable; his distance remains fixed once it is established until he skilfully moves to another point of view.

Flaubert's manipulation of distance can be seen more clearly, if negatively, by examining Conrad's attempt to utilize it. In Almayer's Folly, the Dutch trader has seen his dreams of wealth and security apparently dissolve when he discovers the body of a native he believes to be Dain, who had offered him the opportunity to realize his ambitions. It is important that Conrad give us an accurate and convincing picture of Almayer's state of mind, for the balance of the novel depends almost wholly upon the motivation of Almayer's actions following this scene. The long paragraph of Conrad's analysis of Almayer's feelings begins,

Almayer raised his hands to his head and let them fall listlessly by his side in the utter abandonment of despair. Babalatchi, looking at him curiously, was astonished to see him smile. A strange fancy had taken /sic/ possession of Almayer's brain, distracted by this new misfortune (p. 99).

Conrad begins by viewing Almayer from a Neutral Omniscience focus and then shifts to Babalatchi's eyes and back to the author's view again. In the next sentence we move inside the trader's consciousness with Selective Omniscience:

It seemed to him that for many years he had been falling into a deep precipice. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he had been falling, falling, falling; it was a smooth, round black thing, and the black walls had been rushing upwards with wearisome rapidity (p. 99).

At this point the effect is one of despair, tinged by slight hysteria--Almayer's smile and in two sentences following the previous sentence, "It struck him as funny." Still within Almayer's mind Conrad drops the precipice image and continues with a different one:

He seemed somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble. Poor, poor fellow! Why doesn't he cut his throat? He wished to encourage him; he was very anxious to see him lying dead over that other corpse (pp. 99-100).

We now have, with the despair and hysteria, self-pity, not necessarily a normal progression. Almayer then begins to doubt his sanity, with a shift from direct to indirect internal monologue, then to external scene:

Was he going mad? Terrified by the thought he turned away and ran towards his house repeating to himself, "I am not going mad; of course not, no, no, no!" He tried to keep a firm hold of the idea. Not mad, not mad. He stumbled as he ran blindly up the steps repeating fast and ever faster those words wherein seemed to be his salvation. He saw Nina standing there . . . (p. 100).

Almayer calls for drink: "'Give me some gin! Run!'" and slumps into his chair.

Almayer felt very tired now, as if he had come from a long journey. He felt as if he had walked miles and miles that morning and now wanted to rest very much (p. 100).

But this mood is brief, for after Nina speaks to him, "Almayer's elaborately calm demeanour gave way in a moment to an outburst of violent indignation" (p. 101). And there follows a paragraph in which he berates Nina for her callousness.

The parade of emotions is bewildering, for although a man may experience a variety of states after shock, Conrad has failed to make these convincing in Almayer. They are blurred; no relationship or motivation for the progression is shown because the author has not focused them clearly. As Crankshaw points out, temperamentally Conrad lacked objectivity.³⁴ What he has done with Almayer in this analysis is to show only sympathy, not insight. This is only a fragment of a complete novel, but it is indicative of the real failure of distance in both Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands: the characters, particularly Almayer, Willems, and Lingard, are not living figures. Because of Conrad's vacillations in point of view--entering a character's mind, stepping out of it, with no real principle of determination--and his inability to separate himself from his personal sympathies, the only points at which the characters are fully rounded, convincing individuals is in their action. The point may be made about Conrad's characterization generally: when he allows his characters to act, when he renders them instead

³⁴Crankshaw, p. 85.

of depending upon internal analysis, they are much more clearly drawn, both internally as well as externally.

When Conrad explains the origin of the Dutch trader thirteen years later in A Personal Record (1908) a far more convincing picture of Almayer is given.

Leaning over the rail of the bridge I looked at Almayer, who looked down at the wharf in aggrieved thought. He shuffled his feet a little; he wore straw slippers with thick soles. The morning fog had thickened considerably. Everything round us dripped: the derricks, the rails, every single rope in the ship--as if a fit of crying had come upon the universe.

Almayer again raised his head and, in the accents of a man accustomed to the buffets of evil fortune, asked hardly audibly: "I suppose you haven't got such a thing as a pony on board?" (p. 77)

These two sections have different subjects, but the essential intention is much the same, to give the reader Almayer as convincingly as possible. The key quality associated with the Dutch trader is despair, the frustration of an empty life among people not his own, and the quality is more evident here than in the former minute internal analysis because here it is concretely particularized by overt detail. Conrad's inability to maintain a consistent distance (both in focus of material and attitudes towards it) is also wholly avoided eight years after An Outcast of the Islands in Nostromo.

This novel, which has been called by Walter Allen "the most highly organized novel in English apart from perhaps the late James and Joyce's Ulysses,"³⁵ and by a standard history

³⁵The English Novel, p. 299.

of English literature "a confusing and overopulent story,"³⁶ is far too complex structurally for an extended analysis at this point. Its most interesting aspect for present purposes is the point of view, which is dominantly external, with the author viewing the story from a wide variety of distances, from Neutral Omniscience to Dramatic Mode. It is, to use Crankshaw's term, "cinematographic,"³⁷ and long before the potentialities of motion pictures had been realized. Instead of a few characters in an environment limited geographically and chronologically, Conrad uses a large cast of characters from all social levels, a whole country, and an entirely different concept of time. But in the huge structure, Conrad rarely confuses his distance and focus, and is able to maintain this distance without a narrator. He does so largely because he avoids extensive internal analysis, depends upon concrete rendering whenever possible, and carefully controls all the currents of the novel from a point outside of them. The point of view is sometimes Multiple Selective Omniscience, but the material is presented scenically, not ruminated upon, as is the case in the Malaysian novels. Nostromo presents many other aspects of importance in Conrad's structural method, but the success of the novel to a great extent comes because Conrad was able to avoid those pitfalls which harmed the two earlier novels.

In The Secret Agent the canvas is more limited. There

³⁶The Literary History of England, p. 1553.

³⁷Crankshaw, p. 180.

are not many characters--Mr. Verloc, Winnie, the Assistant Commissioner, Stevie, Vladimir, Inspector Heat, and some assorted anarchists--and the setting is a limited area of western London. Here also Conrad uses an external point of view, with the greater part of the novel being composed of scenes, very much like a play.³⁸ John Hagan has shown that the basic design of the novel is a series of interview scenes: Verloc and Vladimir; Ossipon's two conversations with the mad Professor; the Assistant Commissioner and Chief Inspector Heat; the Assistant Commissioner and the Under-Secretary; and Winnie and Verloc's bedroom conversations.³⁹ There is a minimum of action except in these scenes; the central incident, the bombing of Greenwich Observatory, never appears in the novel directly. Each of these interviews is carefully balanced against the other, and the two key scenes, those curiously dead exchanges between Verloc and his wife, are contrasted with each other. Since the action of the novel is largely dialogue, it is objective and serves to provide the distance which establishes the basic tone of the novel, irony. The novelist is apart from his characters in the greater part of the novel, and stays so even more consistently than he does in Nostromo. The point of view is not Dramatic Mode completely, but is closer to it than Conrad reaches in any of his other novels.

³⁸Conrad adapted the novel into a play of the same title (1920) and presented it in 1922, with relatively few changes; it was not a commercial success.

³⁹John Hagan Jr., "The Design of Conrad's The Secret Agent," ELH, XXII (June, 1955), 146-64.

In the remaining three novels--The Rescue, The Rover, and Victory--the problem of distance is met with varying success. In The Rescue, possibly because once again he was with a personage and the locale of the Malaysian novels, Conrad is not very successful in establishing a perspective. He uses Lingard and other narrators for expository purposes, comments frequently as the author, projects scenes less often than he does in Nostromo and The Secret Agent, focuses through the characters at some points, and, in general, wavers in a way much like his earlier manner. Lingard, the same captain of Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands in name only, is a vague, romantic and indecisive shade, largely because Conrad is not really able to decide upon an attitude to take towards him.

Apparently returning to the method of Nostromo expanded by several narrators, Conrad attempts to view the events in Victory with dispassionate objectivity, but is not able to control his sympathies and some obvious ambivalence occurs. The novel begins with a narrator, presumably the author himself since there is no attempt to establish his identity, who soon shifts to a first person plural. The point of view switches to a series of ambiguous narrators who comment upon Heyst, then there is a long scene involving Heyst and Morrison, seen mostly externally; the focus returns to an unidentified narrator, and then to Davidson, who continues reappearing throughout the rest of the novel to narrate sections of it. The last third of the novel is seen with growing frequency through Heyst, Lena, and Ricardo, and much less of

the "I" Witness focus is used. Apparently realizing that he was becoming much too deeply involved with Heyst and Lena's emotions, Conrad picks up Davidson, with what Guerard calls "one of the most preposterous last minute appearances in all fiction,"⁴⁰ to narrate the closing chapter and to tie up all the loose strings. Because of Conrad's gradual involvement with his characters, the last section of the novel is diffuse and weak except in those scenes which are dramatically projected. Once again, Conrad's distance is clear until he forgets his perspective and thus his attitude towards his characters.

Although in The Rover, Conrad filters much of the story through Peyrol, he is probably saved from too much involvement because the old sea rover has a single and direct sensibility. His nature is such that he does not ruminate, is content to see directly and clearly, and the real purpose of the story is not a gradual revelation of the complexities of Peyrol's mind. The general action of the novel is external, a concentration upon events, and much of it is seen in directly projected visual scenes, where the emphasis is upon the details and not their effect upon a consciousness. In this respect it is unlike any of Conrad's other novels, and although it lacks the real complexity of meaning of the others, it is effectively and clearly focused.

Returning then to the illusive Marlow, it should be apparent that because of Conrad's temperament, his whole

⁴⁰Guerard, Joseph Conrad, p. 24.

creative vision, he was forced into using a means of establishing his distance from the story. Marlow was an ideal means of doing this. In those novels which do not focus through a narrator, the success of the work is almost in direct ratio to the extent to which Conrad was able to stay apart from his characters and story. Those novels which have been cited as having an ambivalence of distance are not to be condemned for this reason alone, however; they are certainly major achievements, and the first two--Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands--were a necessary part of Conrad's structural apprenticeship.

It has been said that Marlow was a living character, and that this was an important aspect of his use as a narrator. One of the most concise characterizations of the mariner comes not from Conrad but from Virginia Woolf:

Marlow was one of those born observers who are happiest in retirement. Marlow liked nothing better than to sit on deck, in some obscure creek of the Thames, smoking and recollecting; smoking and speculating; sending after his smoke beautiful rings of words until all the summer's night became a little clouded with tobacco smoke. . . . He had a flair for human deformity, his humour was sardonic. Nor did Marlow live entirely wreathed in the smoke of his own cigars. He had a habit of opening his eyes suddenly and looking--at a rubbish heap, at a port, at a shop counter--and then complete in its burning ring of light that thing is flashed bright upon the mysterious background.⁴¹

We have with this narrator a man of sympathy and tolerance. Even though he says of himself, "I am not particularly fit to be a receptacle of confessions" (Lord Jim, p. 34), he is

⁴¹The Common Reader, p. 313.

the one in whom Jim confides everything. Young Powell finds in him a sympathetic ear; he garners his information without prying or forcing himself upon those who chose him for a confidant. He is a man of rigid honesty, a sailor with the simple but absolute values of the shipboard community who suspects facts, "naked and ugly" (Lord Jim, p. 35), and as a consequence relies much upon emotion and feeling. Although he is intelligent and perceptive, he is not of a particularly profound frame of mind, and is often conservative and indecisive, preferring to ignore the obvious and to contemplate mysteries (often just verbal) which he frequently creates himself. Because of his background at sea, his full experience with violent action, he has faced much turbulence, and has a wide acquaintance with exotic places and men. There are some changes in Marlow with his appearance in Chance after an absence of fifteen years ("Youth," 1902). He is more pedantic, given to tedious moralizing, and is even occasionally short-tempered, but even so he is remarkably consistent with his previous characterizations. All of these qualities, then, make Marlow the ideal narrator for those stories he tells because he is fitted by nature and experience to see them fully and sympathetically. It should be remembered that all of the details in Marlow's narratives are dependent upon his nature as a man because they are focused through his sensibility, and the shape they take is the shape he gives them; to be completely accurate, the shape of the details depends upon the shape Conrad has given Marlow. If Jim's tale were told directly by Conrad, or through Jim's consciousness alone,

the result would have been entirely different, a different novel with different structure and meanings. Also a great many of Marlow's qualities as a character come to us through the way he tells his tale and what he chooses to tell us.

The other narrators besides Marlow who serve to focus large parts of the novels are also carefully chosen by Conrad to shape the material they narrate. A marked similarity can be seen between Mitchell of Nostromo and Davidson of Victory, for example. Both are fussy, talkative, but basically good men with some curiosity but little real understanding. Mitchell is described as a man "with an air of old-fashioned neat old bachelorhood about him, slightly pompous, in a white waistcoat, a little disregarded and unconscious of it; utterly in the dark, and imagining himself to be in the thick of things" (p. 112). Davidson is quite similar, "a good, simple fellow in his way" (p. 29). The qualities provide Conrad with some effective means of obtaining irony, especially so with Mitchell's anti-climactic and totally superficial summing up of the chaotic revolution in Nostromo: "An historical event, sir" (p. 473). Mitchell is the double focus spoken of earlier, the naive narrator who gives a version of the story we know is limited. Almayer's tale of grief to Lingard (pp. 176-81) is also seen in the curiously distorted light of his frustration.

The accusation that Marlow, and with him the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes, is just Conrad's stand-in is really not relevant to the central issue of a narrator. It is true that there are striking resemblances between

Conrad and his narrators (and some important differences too); but the question of whether or not a character is the author's mouthpiece is not so important as is the consistency and realization of that character. If he is believable in the novel, and his comments and actions are wholly in tune with his identity, then whom he is speaking for is of minor importance. If the point were pushed far enough, all of the characters in any given novel are stand-ins for the author since they are children of his creation, but only when they step out of themselves and mouth sentiments or ideas which are not germane to their nature and are not otherwise motivated, can they be weaknesses of structure. The irony and compassion expressed by Marlow are his own because he is the sort of person who would feel and express them, and Conrad has created him fully enough so that this is believable. To indirectly accuse Conrad of repudiating his responsibilities as a man by placing the burden of them upon Marlow's shoulders is also tangential; Conrad, and the novelists in his tradition, did not conceive of the novel as a means of unburdening personal responsibilities, and since Marlow is a device for giving form and meaning to the novels in which he appears, a far more important responsibility is served.

The effect of Conrad's narrators upon the structures of his novels can be seen fully only from a careful analysis of these novels, but some generalizations can be made from a broad view. As has been suggested earlier, the narrator is free either to summarize his story or to project it dramatically, but the natural tendency on the part of anyone

who tells a story, from a simple joke to an involved personal experience, is to dramatize, to present his actors speaking and acting as they speak and act. This accounts, on a realistic level, for the scenic nature of Marlow's "style" of narration in both Chance and Lord Jim. But a more important reason is the significance to be placed on exposition as contrasted to flow of narrative. One great advantage to the narrator device is that exposition, necessary background information, can be introduced naturally, often "shown" instead of "told," when the narrator feels it necessary, rather than by breaking the chronology and flow of the narrative, as is sometimes unavoidable from other points of view. The ideal balance would be for the narrator to summarize unimportant expository material and project dramatically the important parts of his story. Conrad's handling of exposition is extremely skillful in all of his novels, as will be seen later, but his problems in one novel, Lord Jim, are of particular interest because they are so closely related to his use of Marlow in the novel.

Marlow, it was pointed out earlier, does not appear in the novel until page thirty-five, at which point he begins his story. The preceding section, all necessary background information about Jim's early life--even a foreshadowing of his later fate is planted--is narrated by the author and shown through Jim's eyes. The important question at this point is why? Why did Conrad, who goes to such extremes to justify Marlow's credibility as a device, make no attempt to explain the existence of these pages, in which he steps outside his framework without explaining his reasons for doing so? In

the balance of the novel all of the essential exposition has been gathered by Marlow from his personal contacts and is explained in this way. The only possible answer seems to be that this is a flaw in the structure, a flaw wholly avoided in Chance and almost so in Under Western Eyes. The flaw is not startling unless one searches for it, but it does weaken the effect of a novel which depends upon a structural device. It is almost as though Conrad had no intentions of using Marlow until he found that he couldn't continue without him.

An important external event in the novel is Jim's actions upon the sinking of the Patna, but what has bothered many readers of the novel is that the narration of this event is not begun until page eighty-four, and the whole picture of what happened at that time is not completely clear until much later. Since, in one sense, the whole novel rests upon the event, a common feeling is that Conrad delays its appearance unnecessarily or withholds its presentation for an artificial effect. There can be dramatic reasons for Conrad's doing so; any novelist is aware of the potency of withheld information for purposes of suspense, and Conrad is no exception, but by itself this is not a good enough reason, for withholding information and drawing out a crucial scene must serve some purpose in the whole structure of the novel as well. What is more relevant is that we receive the scene and the whole view of Jim in just the way that Marlow did, in his words, "those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog" (p. 76). The purpose of Lord Jim is, as Crankshaw so aptly phrases it, "rendering a complete personality in relation to

his environment."⁴² The importance of the Patna incident lies not in what happened, but its effect upon Jim, and, in turn, the whole novel is a study of the effect of Jim upon others--Stein, Brierly, Marlow, Gentleman Brown--and their effect upon him. We are shown the Patna incident in fragments as each part becomes significant in the total structure; the whole scene at once would place a wrong emphasis, thus the "digressive" quality and structure of the novel. What would be exposition in a different kind of novel is actually central in Lord Jim (and in other of the novels) because the backgrounds are as important, or more so, than the events in the foreground. The principle, the Impressionists' view of a novel as the effects as well as the causes, is important in all of Conrad's structures, especially in his handling of exposition, and illumines the apparently fragmentary way in which the narrators tell their stories.

In summary, point of view offers one of the few concrete ways of examining the structure of a novel. The focus through which the story is seen determines to a great extent the length, meaning, depth, and form of the story itself. Conrad's development of and experimentation with various points of view are basic to an understanding of his methods. The novel, for him and his tradition, is not an external progression of events alone, but the effect of these events upon those who observe or participate in them, and such a view necessitated the development of a means of presenting these effects to

⁴²Crankshaw, p. 53.

the reader most convincingly. Beginning with an attempt to follow Flaubert's shifting but consistent focuses, Conrad found himself unable to maintain any real impersonality and perspective because of his sympathies with his characters and wavering points of view. The result was the introduction of a narrator, at first the anonymous voice of the crew in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" and then the living character who participates in the action as well as narrates it, Marlow, or his counterparts. In his most successfully focused novels Conrad either utilized the narrator device or kept himself apart emotionally and focally from his characters, depending upon concrete rendering through scene or indirect omniscient author narration. But whereas point of view is exceedingly important as a keystone in the structure, there are other aspects of it which, although dependent upon point of view, are important in their own right. One of the foremost of these in Conrad's novels is time.

2. Time

Just as characteristic of Conrad's structures as his experiments with point of view is his distortion of chronology, or what Donald Davidson has called his "inversive method."⁴³ The normal progress of time in a novel or any narrative is straightforward: the protagonist is picked up at a specific point in time and carried chronologically to another. There are many variations of this pattern and violations of chronology before Conrad, of course, examples as widespread as

⁴³"Joseph Conrad's Directed Indirections," Sewanee Review, XXXIII (1925), 163.

Tristram Shandy and even Beowulf, but the direct progression is usual and departures from it are not the general rule in traditional novels. The pace of the period in time chosen for the novel must be varied because, as Joyce has demonstrated in Ulysses, even a small fragment of time if fully dissected has more than enough richness of meaning for any one novel. There are devices such as flashback which may seem to break the progression, but these in their most common form merely hold it in check while necessary exposition is introduced.

One very common "plot" device which may seem to force time to unique uses--best seen in the perennially popular murder mystery--is the novel in which certain facts are suppressed for purely dramatic reasons until they can be uncovered at a crucial point, thus shocking the reader and impressing him with the author's ingenuity; or, a variation of this, the complicated web of mystery which, growing steadily more complicated, is completely cleared up at the end of the novel and the reader satisfied. The effect of such a device upon time in the novel is not such that the progression is broken so much as it is that certain facts are withheld from the reader until a point is reached which will be most dramatically effective for their revelation; it is essentially a "trick," however well done. All of the events and details are in reality a direct movement towards the climactic scene or scenes, a step by step progression towards the point at which the author pulls the rug out from under us or introduces the hero's real father, and externally solves all of the problems which his book has raised. The

device is a purely dramatic means of achieving suspense; time is usually straightforward, although the pace may be varied, because the real purpose of the novel is to build towards a single, clinching dramatic effect. The "intrigue" structure has a long and honorable history: Tom Jones, Ivanhoe, The Woman in White, The Return of the Native, The Tale of Two Cities.

Another common structural view of chronology is that method employed by Arnold Bennett in The Old Wive's Tale. In Bennett's novel the subject is actually time, the effect of years upon a nucleus of related lives. It is "panoramic" in the sense that the emphasis is upon several people seen for a period of years instead of a small group or a single character seen for a restricted period of time. It is not so much the intimate and hidden springs of character in Constance Baines, Sophia, Gerald Scales, and the others in the novel that Bennett shows us, but what approximately forty years have done to the family group. In this sort of novel, which Beach calls the "sequence novel,"⁴⁴ time must of necessity be largely sequential because the subject is, in a large measure, the progression of time and its effect upon character. Examples of this sort of structure can be seen in The Forsyte Saga, Vanity Fair, and many of Trollope's novels.

With the advent of naturalism, a view of time in the novel is introduced which has relationships to the "panoramic" approach: the so-called "slice of life" technique. Here

⁴⁴ The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 247.

passage of time is not so important as is the breadth of it; the author views an enlarged canvas of characters and attempts to present breadthwise a view of a social structure, of many people whose characters the novel does not try to develop, but presents, camera-like, at a fairly static moment in time. The foremost examples of this breadthwise mass of detail are probably the novels of John Dos Passos (which are greatly indebted to Joyce), Manhattan Transfer and the trilogy U.S.A. Although in this kind of novel, there is still progress of time, it has no real effect upon character since the view is not of individuals but of a mass.

Obviously there are many more approaches to time in the novel, but these three are enough to illustrate the point at hand, that the nature of narrative demands a consecutive passage through time. The pace of the unit of time may be varied, expanded for a long chronicle or contracted for a unified narrow view. Narrative is, from the approach of traditional rhetoric, a movement through time, life in motion.

In Conrad's novels, however, there are exceptions to this view of time, more so than is usual in the works of any previous novelist, and the reason for them goes back, once again, to the concept of the novel form which was held by the Impressionists, chiefly Ford Madox Ford. Some comments of Ford's can be helpful in clarifying this concept as it applied to time.

For it became very early evident to us that what was the matter with the Novel, and the British novel in particular, was that it went straightforward, whereas in your gradual making acquaintanceships

with your fellows you never do go straight-forward. . . . To get such a man [an English gentleman of your golf club] in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past.

. . .

The novel more or less gradually, more or less deviously lets you into the secrets of the characters of the men with whom it deals. Then, having got them in, it sets them to work.

. . .

A novel must therefore not be a narration, a report.⁴⁵

One reason for Conrad's occasional unorthodox chronology might well be suspense, or as Beach calls it, "story-telling strategy," the "actual strategy of many an excellent raconteur."⁴⁶ But if the violations are partly a means of catching the reader's interest, they have often failed, for from as early as 1927 on, many readers have shared Wilbur Cross's view that the device "puts an undue strain upon the memory and imagination of readers who have little of either."⁴⁷ The usual function of suspense in a novel is to lead the reader into a curiosity about what will happen next, but Conrad often, as in Lord Jim and Chance, informs the reader early in the novel what has happened; the suspense comes instead from what the characters' reactions will be.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ford, Joseph Conrad, pp. 129-30, 179, 180, resp.

⁴⁶The Twentieth Century Novel, pp. 360, 364.

⁴⁷"The Illusions of Joseph Conrad," p. 469.

⁴⁸In fairness to Professor Beach, it should be said that he finds a further "esthetic rationale" for Conrad's indications: "so as to get the subject into some new illuminating perspective" (p. 364).

Conrad's inversions have a much more fundamental reason for their existence. The broken chronology takes emphasis away from external events and places it upon the reactions to events. In The Rover, which has been previously described as a novel concerned chiefly with surface events, the chronology is straightforward with very little deviation from the pattern. Also in this novel, and the usual chronological narrative, the action which the characters perform is more important than the action which happens to them. By breaking up time and "working backwards and forwards" Conrad is able to obtain a completely different perspective, the only one which revealed the truth he sought to present. The views we get of Jim through fragments, "glimpses through the shifting rents," patches of conversation, narration, certainly follow no normal chronological sequence--they intentionally avoid it. But by the end of the novel we have so firm a grasp of the man that we can almost predict his next move; we actually know more about Jim than he could ever know himself. Ignoring what other technical flaws the novel may have, Jim is as fully realized a character as can be found in the English novel, and it is doubtful whether these insights could ever have been obtained through the traditional step by step chronology.

In his provocative study of Conrad, Albert Guerard Jr. has stated that Conrad was temperamentally unable to handle direct chronology; as a matter of fact, he "usually floundered when he tried to handle consecutive dramatic action." ⁴⁸

⁴⁸Guerard, Joseph Conrad, p. 65.

The comment introduces an important aspect of Conrad's handling of time which needs expansion because it would be easy to overemphasize his violations of normal time patterns. To test the accuracy of this judgment, a categorical breakdown of the twelve novels reveals approximately to what extent Conrad did depart from the sequential time order. Three groups can be established: those novels which follow a conventional time sequence almost wholly, allowing normal deviation for exposition, flashback, and variance of pace; those novels which have a basic chronology, a sequential period of time which is the core of the narrative, but build around this core with frequent inversions, contractions and expansions; and finally those novels in which there is little attempt made at a basic pattern of consecutive action, or in which the real structure of the novel is not based on time but upon order of ideas or character.

In the first group three of the twelve novels fit accurately: The Rover--the chronology of which has been discussed before--The Arrow of Gold, and The Nigger of the "Narcissus." In the latter novel the entire action is consecutive. The narrative opens with Baker, mate of the ship, speaking, "'Are all the hands aboard, Knowles?'" (p. 3). We are at a specific point in time and a specific place, the beginning of the voyage of the "Narcissus" from Bombay Harbor, and we follow the progress of the voyage day by day until, at the close of the novel, the ship docks some weeks later on the Thames. Not everything that happened on the voyage is included, of course, because not everything is of importance to the

intention of the novel, but the movement of time is consecutive. It has been said that in a novel which follows conventional chronology--as in The Rover--the importance tends to fall upon the events, and it is obvious that in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" external action is not so important as the result of that action. The apparent contradiction is resolved in the novel by selection and pace. Because of the focus, through an unimportant member of the crew, only those sections are shown which convey the effect of Wait upon the ship and crew, and although time is sequential, important points of time are expanded and unimportant ones contracted or skipped entirely. The Arrow of Gold also avoids this problem by having the narrator tell his own story; he is free to pause at any point and analyze his emotions at length, and he would naturally choose to expand only those points of time which furthered the intention of his narrative. Although The Rover may be an inferior novel, as Guerard feels, and even The Arrow of Gold not equal to Conrad's best, their weaknesses cannot be attributed to Conrad's inability to handle consecutive dramatic action alone, because there are a great many other important factors to consider. The Nigger of the "Narcissus" is striking testimony to Conrad's ability to utilize a straightforward chronology, and do so with considerable skill.

The novels which have a basic sequential time structure but vary from it frequently make up the largest group: Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, The Rescue. It is easy to form the impression that there is a cavalier disregard for sequence in these

novels because of the frequent shifts, the expository flashbacks, and leaps in time, but the basic narrative in all of these novels is a movement through time, as can be seen by looking closely at the time progressions.

If we can adopt an alphabetical means of indicating time, the chronological sequences can be plotted. In Almayer's Folly, the specific time of Almayer's life with which the novel is concerned may be seen as L, the point in his life at which the novel begins (his reverie on the verandah), and Z, his death at the close of the novel. Having established Almayer at the point of time with which the basic narrative is concerned (what might be termed the "narrative present") the novel moves, through his reverie, to his past, or DEF. We are given here the reasons for his position on the river, his relationships to Lingard, and other very essential information. After only a few pages of this exposition, the novel returns to the narrative present and moves forward until Chapter Two: O,P. Then there is a long section of flashback, fifty-four pages, which introduces Nina, Dain, the natives of the post, and in its chronological movement (the time of the flashback) comes up to the point in the narrative present at which it departed: G . . . K. From Chapter Six on until Almayer's death, the narrative is in general chronological, however with many switches in point of view and changes in pace. The pattern of time in the novel then can be roughly indicated, by chapters as L, DEF, M, N, O, P, GHIJK, Q-Z, with the normal progression broken only by the two flashbacks. Unfortunately such a pattern can not give a completely accurate

representation; for example there is some simultaneity which cannot be shown: while Almayer is wondering when Dain will appear (in the narrative present), unknown to Almayer Dain has arrived at the settlement and is in conference with Babalatchi and Lakamba, this presented in the flashback. There are also many subtleties of focus which make the structure much more involved than a diagram can show.

A portion of Almayer's life earlier than the events of Almayer's Folly provides the time of Conrad's second novel, and the center of the narrative is not Almayer but another of Lingard's proteges, Willems. In An Outcast of the Islands, there are even more variations on the basic chronology. The first four chapters provide the background to the central narrative; no sequential time pattern is followed in these chapters, and Conrad works "forwards and backwards" over Willems until his presence as Almayer's assistant at the trading post has been explained, chiefly through a series of scenes. Chapter Five is also expository, and not until Chapter Six, three months after Willems has arrived at the post, are we plunged into the time of the narrative. From here on the narrative moves chronologically, excepting Almayer's long narration--actually a flashback--in Chapters Two and Three of Part III, and Lingard's introspection in the following chapter. In the closing pages of the book, "Many years afterwards . . ." (p. 360), Almayer tells a visitor of the events following Willems' death. It is clear that in both these novels Conrad is straining away from the limits of chronology but is still bound by them, and although

it is dangerous to generalize, there is certainly some truth in Beach's judgment that the blocks of exposition in both these novels seem "as if the story had outrun itself and the author had to go back and catch up."⁴⁹ At any rate, the breaks in chronology seem to add little to the revelation of character, and probably because of the ambiguous points of view, they often confuse the direction of the novel.

In some ways, the most interesting structure of all of Conrad's novels is that of The Secret Agent. The novel is, as has been suggested, a series of dramatic interviews, and, at the risk of repetition, these can be enumerated in order along with the chapters in which they occur: Verloc's interview with Vladimir, II; the meeting of the anarchists, III; the first of the bedroom conversations between Winnie and Verloc, III; Ossipon's first cafe discussion with the Professor, III; Inspector Heat's querying of police officials and his talks with the Assistant Commissioner, IV and V; the Assistant Commissioner's first visit with Sir Ethelred, VII; the second bedroom scene between Winnie and Verloc, VIII; the second interview between Sir Ethelred and the Assistant Commissioner, X; the long scene between Winnie and Verloc, climaxed by Winnie's stabbing of Verloc, XI; Ossipon's "wooing" of Winnie, XII; and the last scene in the novel, Ossipon's second cafe conversation with the mad purveyor of explosives, the Professor, XIII.

⁴⁹The Twentieth Century Novel, p. 362.

The general design of the book is expository (at times summary) narrative, then scene, with the "filling-in" behind the scenes held to a minimum and the action of the novel moving through the interviews. Although there is a consecutive progress of time through the novel the pattern is broken with some interesting results. The actual bombing of the observatory, the central point of the novel, is never shown directly. In Chapter II, Verloc finds himself forced by his superior, Vladimir, into preparing for the deed. While the anarchists, who know nothing of the plans, meet at Verloc's shop in Chapter II, he ponders his unfortunate predicament. The actual bombing takes place in time between the end of Chapter III and the beginning of Chapter IV, as the reader discovers from Ossipon's cafe meeting with the Professor in Chapter IV. The reader also discovers this from the switch to the police investigations of the bombing in Chapters IV, V, and VI. So far the chronology is normal, with the exception of a flashback in Chapter VI, the reader having been shown the events preceding the bombing and the investigations following it; however, there is a considerable leap in time between Chapters III and IV. It is also clear from the Assistant Commissioner's investigations that the deed was performed by Verloc and his idiot brother-in-law Stevie, who was killed in the abortive explosion. The progression of time from Chapters I-VII might be charted this way:

A, B, C, I, J, K, L.

In Chapter VIII the basic chronology is suspended and we go back to the time which was skipped between Chapters

III and IV. In this section Verloc begins to develop his plans for using Stevie as the carrier of the bomb, and much of the background concerning the idiot boy with the strange sensitivity, and Winnie's mother is skilfully inserted. This insertion is also chronological and moves forward in a natural sequence until the actual bombing, which is once again skipped over. In Chapter IX the transition is handled quite naturally: Verloc leaves early and comes back late on the day of the bombing (p. 190); Winnie is alone (Stevie having previously been sent by Verloc to a place in the country) and meets Verloc when he returns, having no knowledge of his actions during the day. At this point in the chapter (p. 190), the events are happening simultaneously with those of Chapters IV-VIII. The reader is placed in Verloc's shop and observes the reactions of Verloc, and Winnie's gradual understanding of what has occurred to her beloved brother Stevie--all of which is occurring at the same time as the investigations of Heat and the Assistant Commissioner in the previous chapters. The two streams of time merge at the close of Chapter IX with Heat's visit to the shop, and from Chapter X on there is just the one chronological stream of the narrative. The whole time scheme of the novel can be plotted, by chapters, as A,B,C,I,J,K,L, DEFG, HIJKL, M-Z.

The experimental shift backwards in the basic chronology of The Secret Agent and the consequent simultaneity is a device tried briefly in Almayer's Folly and, of course, is fairly common in Lord Jim, but there are few other novels in

which it demonstrates so well the rationale of Conrad's inversions. It is not difficult to understand why he would have called the novel a "perfectly genuine piece of work" which gave him "one of the minor satisfactions of my writing life" (p. xiii). The avoidance of the bombing incident, the suspended time, the dramatic scene-by-scene progression all throw the weight of the novel upon Winnie and Verloc and the entangling web which traps them. The abortive bombing attempt is only important insofar as it begins the spinning of this web. Because of the suspended time, the reader is able to watch the aftermath of the bombing and its reaction upon the police, Verloc, and Winnie, all of which occurs at the same time, in separate sections. When the two levels of time merge, the novel moves directly and powerfully to the ironic tragedy of its conclusion. The permeating irony of the novel is enforced by the paralleled interview scenes, and the progression of the novel is through these scenes. The suspensions also perform the very important function of providing the reader, early in the novel, with full details about the bombing, Verloc, and Stevie, so that he can watch, with the possession of the knowledge, as Winnie, the real protagonist of the tragedy, sees her world crumbling and slowly realizes the truth.

The Secret Agent succeeds admirably in fulfilling those intentions which Ford held to be the purpose of the novel; it reveals the secrets of its characters deviously and gradually, and having "got them in, sets them finally to work." In addition to being an excellent illustration of Conrad's

chronological method, the novel is a prototype of the modern "thriller" with its half-light of London fog, its suspense, and dramatic revelation of events.

The determining factor in the structure of Under Western Eyes is not so much time as it is point of view. The first, third, and fourth parts are the narrator's editing of Razumov's diary, and the second part is told by the narrator as an "I" witness. Because of the diary, there is considerable introspection on Razumov's part, which is made credible since the diary, although edited and altered by the narrator to third person, is largely Razumov's attempt to resolve his mental conflicts. The chronology is consecutive, with some flashback and simultaneity, although the device is not as fully exploited as it was in The Secret Agent.

The action of the novel opens with Haldin's assassination of the public official in St. Petersburg and Razumov's consequent betrayal of the revolutionary. Part Second switches to the teacher of languages, and Haldin's mother and sister in Geneva. There is some repetition of time, for the Haldins receive news of their son's arrest in St. Petersburg, an event which apparently has occurred (it is not presented in the novel) before the close of Part First. Razumov does not appear on the scene in Geneva until seventy-eight pages of this section have passed, and no explanation is given of what has happened to him in the time between the betrayal and his appearance in Geneva. Nathalie's account of her visit to Chateau Boren (pp. 161-73) is a flashback and the only break in chronology to this point. The narrator leaves

Razumov staring into the water from a parapet of a bridge, and Part Third moves into Razumov's mind as he looks into the water, and follows him as he becomes more closely emeshed with the revolutionaries in Geneva.

In Part Four the events following Razumov's visit to the police in Part First are revealed by the apologetic narrator. The exact point in time which closed the first section, Councillor Mikulin's soft question, "'Where to?'" (p. 100). is the point at which Part Four begins and that sequence is continued for thirteen pages. The novel then returns to the "narrative present" and moves chronologically to its close. The inversion is explained as Razumov's revery at the foot of the statue of Rousseau, and its effect upon the novel is important: the reader is aware that Razumov is apparently engaged in some sort of spying activity among the revolutionaries in Geneva because of their welcome to him as a friend of Haldin's, but the explicit nature of Razumov's position is not made clear until the novel has carefully built up his involved personal relationships, particularly his growing love for the sister of the man he has betrayed. The confession which Razumov makes to Nathalie and the anarchists, and his consequent punishment, has much more impact because the irony of his position is not fully known until the inversion.

The Rescue holds an ambiguous position structurally among the novels; falling somewhere between the involved internal analysis of Almayer's Folly and the "panoramic" method of Nostromo and Victory. This can be accounted for in part by

the fact that the novel was begun in 1890 and not completed until twenty years later (p. vii), and also by Conrad's application of what Wiley calls the "visual" method⁵⁰ to a novel that is basically psychological. The novel opens with Lingard on board his ship, making way to the villages of his friends, a tribe of natives whose internal political affairs Lingard has decided to set straight. The narrative moves forward through Part I, as Lingard discovers the stranded yacht at the mouth of the harbor of his destination. Part II switches to the yacht and the waiting natives in turn, but continues the progress of the narrative chronologically. There is a break in time in Chapter II (forty-eight pages) and the background of Lingard's venture is intermittently introduced through a series of narrators. Part III picks up the narrative again, pausing for two chapters of expository flashback concerned with the people on the yacht. For a considerable space not much action occurs while Lingard is trying to resolve his dilemma. The forces begin to accelerate in Part V, still chronologically, and the actual crisis, the explosion of the Emma, is presented in Part VI through flashback. The novel is diffuse, far too long and repetitious, and the too long flashbacks function largely as a means of providing background for the narrative, which moves too slowly because of the awkward insertions. The climax narrated in retrospect merely suspends the conclusion until such a time as it would be most dramatically

⁵⁰Conrad's Measure of Man, p. 173.

effective. The Rescue, begun early and finished late, contains aspects of structure found in all of the novels, but fails to weld them into a cohesive unity.

In these eight novels even with their varying approaches to chronology there is still the basic progression through time which narrative demands. The action is not always consecutive, but when inversions occur they are based upon and return to the pattern of time which frames the novel. At any rate, the judgment that Conrad was unable to handle consecutive action needs careful qualification. The important point is that he found the traditional chronological structure of the novel ineffective in expressing the complex views which he sought. The time shift allowed him to make words, paragraphs, and details act with much more than their usual function, and gave him a structure which centered upon reactions and not actions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the novels of the last category, Chance, Lord Jim, Victory, and Nostromo.

Each of these novels presents a highly complex task of structural analysis, so much so that a full study might be made of any one of them. For the sake of illustration, analysis of one, Nostromo, will suffice to make clear Conrad's most unconventional experiments with chronology as well as to provide some interesting conclusions about his whole view of structure.⁵¹

⁵¹The time scheme of Lord Jim is plotted by Joseph Warren Beach (The Twentieth Century Novel, pp. 359-64); the structure of Chance is discussed by Henry James (Notes on Novelists, pp. 345-51) and analyzed at length by V. Walpole, "Conrad's Method: Some Formal Aspects," Annals of The University of Stellenbosch, VIII (January, 1930), 1-20. Since Victory is in part an adaptation of the method of Nostromo, many points made about the latter novel apply to it.

3. Nostromo

Nostromo, which Conrad felt "will always remain my largest canvas" (The Secret Agent, p. ix), is the longest of his novels, 566 pages, and by far the most ambitious in scope of setting, character, and structure. The novel is in three parts: "The Silver of the Mine," "The Isabels," and "The Lighthouse." Because the novel is so long and the narrative so entangled with character and setting switches, it is helpful to synopsise in some detail the greatly involved events in chronological order.

The setting of the book is the republic of Costaguana, a South American country of Conrad's invention. Most of the novel takes place in the western section of Costaguana, in the chief city of this section, Sulaco, which is separated from the rest of the republic by an almost impassable range of mountains. The city and the surrounding area is on the Golfo Placido, a large natural bay in which there are two islands, the Great Isabel, and Little Isabel. Located in the province is the fulcrum of the action in the novel, the San Tome' silver mine. The cast of characters is quite large. The owner of the Gould Concession, the silver mine, is Charles Gould, "el Rey de Sulaco," a young Englishman of immense wealth and power in the province, who, with his wife--the "angel of Sulaco"--reigns as social head of the Sulaco aristocracy. Among the Creole aristocrats are Don Jose Avellanos, a disillusioned idealist, the author of "Fifty Years of Misrule," who has eternal dreams of a peaceful republic; his daughter, the beautiful and gifted Antonia,

who is in love with Don Martin Decoud, the cynical Parisian journalist, the son of an aristocratic Costaguana family who has spent much of his youth in France; Dr. Monygham, an English doctor (an older and crippled Lord Jim), a survivor of the horrors of the last revolution, disliked by all as an evil, embittered man, a "fringe" member of the European society in Sulaco; Captain Mitchell, "Fussy Joe," the English superintendent of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company, the O.S.N., an English firm with strong roots in Sulaco; and various "politicos" and survivors of the aristocratic families of Costaguana's past.

The title character, Nostromo, is an Italian seaman who has become, in his capacity as the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores--the leader of the O.S.N. dock workers--the intrepid and dependable backbone of the Sulaco aristocracy and Captain Mitchell's indispensable right hand man. He is incorruptible and places value only upon his reputation as the almost mythical man of the people who can undertake any task successfully.⁵² Also of importance is Nostromo's countryman and patron, Giorgio Viola, who with his family operates a kind of inn for railroad workers. Viola is a relic of the glorious days of Garibaldi and Italian liberty who lives in his past and is a passionate defender of the underdog.

The political background of Costaguana, upon which the action of the novel is based, is the usual turbulent

⁵²Nostromo is, as Conrad admits in the preface, another version of Dominic in The Arrow of Gold and Peyrol of The Rover.

revolution-cursed violence of the South American country. Previous to the time of the narrative, the country was ruled by Guzman Bento, a tyrannical dictator who murdered and tortured his way through several years of terror, until the reformer Don Vincente Ribiera is established as president-dictator, largely through the intervention of Gould and the wealth of the silver mine. The central time of the novel is the revolt against and overthrow of the Ribiera administration by a group, the Monterists, led by General Montero, a comic-opera minister of war under Ribiera.

The direct narrative of the novel begins when Martin Decoud has arrived from Paris with a shipment of new rifles to be used in equipping a force of Ribierists under General Barrios, a faithful ex-military leader who embarks with his troops for a northern city (Cayta) in order to stop the invading Montero armies at that point. Pedro Montero, a brother of the insurgent leader, crosses the mountain range with the intention of capturing the now undefended Sulaco, the wealth of the mine and the increasingly powerful European and American investments there. With the same intention in mind, another Monterist officer, the erstwhile faithful Sotillo, embarks with a steamer full of troops from Esmeralda, another city in the province.

The central incident in the novel is the attempt to save the silver. Decoud, through his love for Antonia Avellanos, has evolved a scheme for making the Occidental Province into an independent republic. Gould, partially in agreement with the scheme, agrees that the silver ingots, the six-month

output of the mine, should be saved from the approaching Pedro Montero, by land, and Sotillo, by sea. Nostromo is the natural person chosen for the task, so he sets sail at night, with Decoud, in the lighter full of silver, with the intention of catching a passing steamer at sea. In the impenetrable darkness of the gulf, the lighter is run down by Sotillo's steamer, entering Sulaco harbor. The rebel leader does not realize the cause of the collision. Nostromo and Decoud are able to reach the Great Isabel with the sinking lighter full of silver, and Decoud is left on the deserted island to guard the cache of silver while Nostromo takes the disabled lighter out into the gulf, sinks it, and swims back to Sulaco. Sotillo, with his troops, lands in Sulaco and, enraged at not finding the silver there, murders a Jewish merchant he believes has knowledge of its location. Dr. Monygham meets Nostromo and sends him to Cayta to bring back Barrios and the Ribierist army to liberate Sulaco from Sotillo and the now arrived Pedro Montero. Endeavoring to gain time, Dr. Monygham convinces Sotillo he knows the location of the silver and sends the wealth-crazed officer on a fool's errand diving for the treasure in the bay.

Meanwhile Decoud (still on the Great Isabel), driven to desperation by his solitude and sense of inadequacy, takes some ingots of silver, climbs into the lighter's dinghy, which has been left him by Nostromo, shoots himself, and falls, weighted by the silver, into the gulf. Nostromo is successful in bringing Barrios and his troops back to Sulaco and the city is freed from Monterists, the Occidental Republic

proclaimed, and the little country grows wealthy from European investments--all of this latter action taking place over a period of several years.

Once peace has been restored, Nostromo makes periodic visits to the silver buried on the Great Isabel. At the time of the attempt to save the silver, everyone has assumed that it was sunk in the bay, and Nostromo has not denied this. Growing steadily richer with the wealth that he had never gained from his previous loyalty, Nostromo decides to marry Viola's older daughter, Linda, a course which has long been accepted by Viola. Meanwhile a lighthouse has been built on the Great Isabel--the treasure still unknown to anyone but Nostromo--and the Violas established by the O.S.N. as keepers of the beacon. Nostromo finds that he really loves Giselle, the younger, more passionate and beautiful Viola daughter, and while making a midnight visit to his treasure, is mistaken by old Viola for a worthless admirer of Giselle, and shot. On his deathbed, the magnificent Capataz confesses, to Mrs. Gould, that he has kept the treasure, and the novel closes on Linda's scream of grief as she learns of Nostromo's death.

The synopsis is necessarily long because the novel has, with some few exceptions, one of the most complex patterns of action and character of any modern novel. It is probably Conrad's greatest accomplishment as an artist that he is able to build this vast, interdependent structure without losing control of any of the parts which make it up.

The best general way of describing the structure of

Nostromo is by drawing analogies to music and, as Crankshaw has done, to the motion pictures. If we follow these comparisons, the novel is like a symphony in three movements, with its gradual introduction to theme, its accelerating movement and rhythm climaxed by Linda's scream of grief; also symphonic is the great richness of themes, repeated and followed, all based on the slow, inevitable current of silver which is the dominant and everpresent theme. The cinematographic quality of the novel comes from the camera-like focuses, ranging over great areas for panoramic views of Costaguana and coming down close to the actors in the drama for sharply etched closeups; also camera-like is the external view which is so characteristic of the novel.

The division of the novel into three sections is essential to its structure. Of the three, only the middle section, "The Isabels," is dominantly chronological narrative. The first section is actually what would be in another novel exposition, but what in Nostromo is a delicately balanced overture to the direct action of the middle section. In this section the geographical setting and political background, plus the events leading to the present political scene, most of the important characters and their natures, the relationships of all of this detail--all of this is presented in a highly involved series of scenes and flashbacks which does not, however, ever move directly into the narrative present of the novel.

The first chapter opens the novel with a slow and detailed panoramic view of Costaguana, particularly the western province, told, or shown, through an omniscient author and in some of

Conrad's most effective descriptive language.⁵³ The movement is slow and gradual and the description is not set at any point in time. Also introduced is the legend of the cursed treasure of Azuera (pp. 4-5), a note which foreshadows the theme of the novel. Chapter Two leaves the geographical setting and moves, still through the omniscient author, to a panoramic view of the social setting and political atmosphere of Sulaco. Patches of dialogue are interspersed between descriptive passages, but there is still no specific location in time. At the close of the chapter there is a reference, through Mitchell's narrative, to the downfall of Ribiera and Nostromo's saving of the deposed dictator-president. Picking up this point, the novel moves from generalized panorama to narrative and the direct focus, this upon the Violas during the riots described briefly at the close of the previous chapter.

In this chapter and the one following (pp. 16-33), necessary background is introduced by a method very characteristic of the novel and Conrad's work generally. In these seventeen pages of narrative the time and setting are specific, but the essential purpose is still background to the main narrative in the middle section. As each character is introduced into the scene, a brief paragraph of explanation follows, but of more importance is the impersonal way in which each

⁵³It is of interest at this point to refer to Ford's discussion of openings for novels: ". . . the opening of a book or story should be of the tempo of the whole performance" (Joseph Conrad, p. 171).

actor is characterized by his reaction to the events taking place. The Signora moans as Giorgio cocks his gun and complains because "Gian' Battista" (Nostromo) is not there to protect them; Giorgio calms her and rolls his eyes fiercely as bullets strike the casa. Chapter Three closes on Nostromo's shout, "'Hola! hola, in there!'" (p. 21). After a brief explanation of Nostromo's appearance, Chapter Four follows from the shout. A paragraph illustrates the sharp dramatic focus:

Meantime Giorgio, with tranquil movements, had been unfastening the door; the flood of light fell on Signora Teresa, with her two girls gathered to her side, a picturesque woman in a pose of maternal exaltation. Behind her the wall was dazzlingly white, and the crude colours of the Garibaldi lithograph paled in the sunshine (p 23).

Immediately following this passage begins a flashback of three pages (pp. 23-26). But it is much more than the simple traditional jump backwards in time; in its "digressive" progress and change from internal thought to external scene it is very interesting in itself--and very illustrative of Conrad's method. The lithograph suggests to Giorgio the past, and Cavour, the name of the arch-traitor Viola often used as a curse (this presented in generalized "habitual" past tense). Then there is a quick transition--still in the flashback--to Signora Teresa's point of view and a scene, projected in normal narrative past tense.

Then Signora Teresa, all in black, issuing from another door, advanced, portly and anxious, inclining her fine, black-browed head, opening her arms, and crying in a profound tone--

"Giorgio! thou passionate man! Misericordia Divina! In the sun like this! He will make himself ill" (p. 24).

The good Signora berates Giorgio for cursing, reminisces about her past, and then the point of view switches to Giorgio, who also thinks briefly of the days of glory with Garibaldi; the latter picking up directly the train of thought (in Giorgio's mind) which had been running through Signora Teresa's mind--the days of their youth. The flashback closes with a long paragraph of description filling in the place of the Violas in Sulaco. The following paragraph begins, "On this memorable day of the riot . . ." (p. 26) and continues the time set up previous to the flashback. The point of importance involved in these brief three pages of flashback is that it is not the usual summarized narrative of exposition, quite common in the earlier novels, but a dramatically presented and carefully constructed scene in itself. It has been said earlier that Conrad was much more effective in characterization when he depended upon action and movement to present qualities of character instead of internal introspection, and this is well demonstrated in the short flashback.

In the balance of Chapter Five, Viola contemplates his children and speaks to them in an exchange which captures Linda's dark intelligent beauty and Giselle's blonde vitality. The chapter closes with more of Viola's background, seen through his mind as he watches the rioting in the Campo.

Such a close following of so short a section of the novel may seem excessive, but the two chapters are important for the light they throw on the method of the whole first section of the novel. The ostensible purpose of these chapters is to provide the reader with some necessary information about

the Violas, and it is interesting to pause and discover just how much information has been conveyed in these seventeen pages of narrative. We have a complete and detailed picture of the Violas, Giorgio, Teresa, Linda, and Giselle; an understanding of Nostromo's relationship as a "foster son" to the Italian family as well as his courage and his power among the laborers of Sulaco; an early view of the revolution which is the basis of the main narrative in the novel; and some information about the railroad workers in Sulaco. All of this very essential detail has come to us not through summary exposition but by and large through direct scene. There is of course introspection, but this does not plunge deeply into the consciousness of the characters; it skims objectively the memories and leaves the analysis of them. The abruptness of the switch from generalized panorama in Chapters One and Two to direct scene in Chapters Three and Four may seem to present an obstacle to the reader, but this is overcome by the brilliant clarity of the narrative; even the short flashback is sharply focused. It is just this method of using dramatically projected scenes at key intervals to keep the exposition immediate and alive that characterizes the balance of the first section of the novel--which is still filling in background for the main narrative.

Leaving the Violas and moving to the Goulds and the aristocracy of Sulaco, Chapter Five begins with a dinner party on board the Juno, a ship of the O.S.N.. The occasion occurs eighteen months before the riots described in Chapters Three and Four and is a celebration in honor of the new president-

dictator, Ribiera. The same dinner party serves as a frame for the entire remaining ninety-seven pages of "The Silver of the Mine" (Chapters Five through Eight). It is mentioned at intervals throughout this section and is the action which leads to the close of it (pp. 130-1). In these pages the background of the Western Province and its chief inhabitants prior to the revolt of General Montero is presented in complete detail. The method is much the same as that in the preceding chapters: panorama from an omniscient author, directly projected scene through the actors in it, a smattering of narrators and bits of conversation, and a highly varied chronological pattern. The variety of time shifts can be illustrated by pointing out the key dramatic scenes as they occur in the section and indicating their chronological order in reference to the dinner party: (1) the dinner party, eighteen months before the Monterist revolution (pp. 35-36); (2) Sir John's trip over the mountains to lay plans for the railroad, a few weeks before the dinner party (pp. 40-43); (3) the meeting of Charles and his future wife in Italy, at least five years before the arrival of the Goulds in Costaguana and eight years before the dinner party (pp. 61-66); (4) a series of conversations between the Goulds in the Casa Gould, previous to the time of the opening of the San Tome mine and approximately four years before the dinner party (pp. 70-74); (5) the two month's journey of the Goulds through the country, at no specific point in time but apparently earlier than the dinner party (pp. 70-74); (6) Charles' interview with state officials in Sta. Marta, also not placed at an exact time but

earlier than the dinner (pp. 88-90); (7) a return to the dinner party, the events following it, and the trip in the carriage back to the Casa Gould (pp. 116-124); (8) Nostromo's visit to the Violas and afterwards his movements through town, immediately following the previous scene in time (pp. 124-131). In between these scenes there is summary narrative and description, but the greater part of the important exposition comes through the scenes themselves.

In this apparently illogical progress of scenes there is the obviously important question of how Conrad is able to handle the transitions without making the progression too abruptly; what binding device is used to relate the scenes to the summary narrative? The most generally used method is that of association, the "digressive" quality which Ford Madox Ford felt gave an accurate representation of the way in which experience comes to us. The movement from summary to scene, or from scene to scene is usually by association of idea rather than normal progress of time--a basic structural principle in all of Conrad's writing. For example, at the opening scene of the dinner party on board the Juno, Sir John engages Mrs. Gould in conversation; the subject of his trip over the mountain range arises and Conrad then moves easily into a projected scene of the crossing. Sir John was guided on his trip by Nostromo, who is the natural subject of the next digression. Nostromo's reputation is praised in a fragment of conversation by Captain Mitchell to Mrs. Gould, and, moving into her mind, the long flashback explaining her meeting with her husband and their early days in Costaguana

is naturally fitted into the pattern. The other incidents and inversions are introduced generally by the same associational technique; much more necessary information is thus shown than would be possible otherwise.

Another way in which the transitions often are made, the more mechanical problem of tense, is by moving from summary to scene through a generalized habitual action past tense to a direct narrative past tense scene. An example will illustrate; this from the long flashback concerned with the Goulds (my *italics*):

On seeing Charles Gould step into the sala
he would nod provisionally and go on to the
end of the oratorical period. Only then he
would say--

"Carlos, my friend, you have ridden from
San Tome in the heat of the day. Always the
true English activity. No? What?"

He drank up all the tea at once in one
draught (p. 51).

And from here on the direct scene continues.

Transitions are also handled by the conventional "stage" directions: "At that time" (p. 62); "And for many years" (p. 53); "Afterwards" (p. 62); "Thus spoke" (p. 76); "It was reported" (p. 99). These are held to a minimum and the changes are usually more smoothly made.

In addition to these devices, the variety of focuses in the long section is enriched by Conrad's technique of inserting scraps of dialogue, sometimes from anonymous speakers, which convey still another view and more details of importance. The dialogue is transcribed directly and, with a method that has had great influence upon modern writers, is reported indirectly, still in the words of the speaker. The movement of

Indian laborers to the San Tome mine is described in this way:

At the sight of such parties strung out on the cross trails between the pastures, or camped by the side of the royal road, travellers would remark to each other--

"More people going to the San Tome mine. We shall see others to-morrow."

And spurring on in the dusk they would discuss the great news of the province, the news of the San Tome mine. A rich Englishman was going to work it--and perhaps not an Englishman, Quien sabe! A foreigner with much money. Oh, yes, it had begun (p. 101).

There are woven through the section key words and scenes which help to bind it together into a thematic whole. One of these is the phrase "material interests," used meaningfully in relationship to Gould and the mine in this section at least twice (pp. 84, 117) and echoed several places later on in the novel. A large part of the action in this section begins in or comes back to the Casa Gould and the periodic gatherings there, which is a kind of center stage for the whole novel. Another recurring detail is the ambitious history of Costaguana politics by the great patriot Don Jose Avellanos, "Fifty Years of Misrule," the pages of which ironically, later in the novel, are used to load powder in cannons during the riot.

Along with these varied means of keeping this considerable bulk of background from being dull and ponderous is the exceptional sharpness and clarity of detail which Conrad employs in writing it. The panoramic shots are frequently a series of brilliant portraits, such as this view of an Indian child:

. . . they would together put searching questions as to the parentage of some small, staid urchin met wandering, naked and grave,

along the road with a cigar in his baby mouth, and perhaps his mother's rosary, purloined for purposes of ornamentation, hanging in a loop of beads low down on his rotund little stomach (p. 102).

Such apparently extraneous details are as essential to the structure as the main narrative itself. As a matter of fact, the entire first section of the novel is so carefully built because Nostromo--and this can be said about many other of Conrad's novels--is as much about background as it is about foreground. "The Silver of the Mine" is not just a long introductory preparation for the main narrative, but it is as much a part of its meaning as is the "story."

The first chapter of "The Isabels" does not begin the narrative present of the novel immediately, but pauses to insert more explanatory information, carried through the omniscient author, a brief scene at the Casa Gould, a quotation from "Fifty Years of Misrule,"⁵⁴ and fragments of conversation. After a few pages Chapter Two begins the immediate chronology of the novel (p. 149), and it continues, with some important interruptions, until Part Three, "The Lighthouse." Beginning with this scene, at the harbor as General Barrios prepares to sail, the narrative moves slowly with much detail, pausing often for generally brief backgrounds about new characters or events; the pauses are not properly digressions but logically introduced explanations which always return to the immediate chronology. The slow pace and generalized view are maintained,

⁵⁴ Apparently forgetting momentarily, Conrad entitles the work "History of Misrule" (p. 142).

following Mrs. Gould and her friends from the dock back to the Casa Gould, until pages 166-172, when a sharply focused scene (at the Albergio d'Italia Una, as Mrs. Gould, in the carriage with Decoud, Don Jose, and Antonia, stops to chat with old Viola) pinpoints in a quick exchange of remarks about Barrios' departure most of the elemental political and human conflicts in the novel.

Decoud, the cynical journalist, asks the old patriot, "'Well, and what do you think of it all, Garabaldino?'" (p. 167), and Viola answers, wholly within his own terms, that the Indian soldiers seemed well-drilled and well-uniformed. He thinks grimly in retrospect of the ragged fighters for Italian liberty, concluding aloud, "'And yet we used to prevail against the oppressor.'" Don Jose, the Costaguana patriot, agrees with eagerness that the new rifles are deadly, completely misunderstanding the significance of Viola's remark. Decoud again speaks to old Viola: "'But who are you for, really, in your heart?'" (p. 168). Viola's answer is, "'For the people'" (p. 168).

A young English engineer for the company building the railroad, part of the "material interests" exploiting Costaguana, joins the group. His first comment is to Mrs. Gould, lamenting that he has missed the dance held the previous night to celebrate Barrios' departure. There is then an interchange between Decoud and Don Jose containing some classical allusions which the engineer misses wholly. The young Englishman expresses the opinion that the revolution will probably ruin the railroad construction. "'You know, it's one of their

so-called national things," he ran on, wrinkling up his nose as if the world had a suspicious flavour to his profound experience of South American affairs" (p. 169). He is temporarily abashed when the grave faces of those in the carriage look at him coldly. The scene is fairly short, composed of swift moving dialogue which accurately mirrors all of the forces moving through the novel: the selfish material interests, foreign to the real nature of the struggle and insensitive to its significance, interested only in personal gain; the European intellectual who sees analytically the futility of political revolution; two forms of patriotism, one an unselfish and fierce devotion to the oppressed wherever they may be, the other just as devoted, but a thinker, ineffectual in action and interested in his country alone. The scene is very much like the method of Flaubert, with its impersonality, implied ironies, and multi-leveled meanings.

The narrative in Chapter Five follows the carriage from Viola's inn to the Casa Gould and more of the long political discussions in the salon. Much of this and the following chapter center on a tete-a-tete between Martin Decoud and Antonia Avellanos (pp. 178-194) as they stand at a window of the Casa, overlooking the streets of Sulaco. Their position offers Conrad an excellent opportunity for introducing new characters--Father Corbelan, Pedro Montero--as well as heightening the relationship between the two lovers. "Behind their backs the political tide that once in every twenty-four hours set with a strong flood through the Gould drawing-room could be heard, rising higher in a hum of

voices" (p. 189).

After everyone has left the Casa, the Goulds (in Chapter Six) talk about the approaching chaos of the Monterist revolt. Up to this point the pace of the narrative has been slow, concerned largely with the sometimes aimless political debates and endless plans of the Sulaco aristocrats. When Decoud enters and reports to Mrs. Gould that he has learned, from Nostromo, that the Ribierists have been defeated at Sta. Marta (p. 212), the pace picks up and moves directly into preparations for saving the silver and Decoud's plan for an independent republic. Chapter Seven suspends the time sequence to introduce one of the most interesting structural devices in the novel, Decoud's letter to his sister in Paris.

The letter is introduced by a cryptic statement, from the author, that Decoud was in the habit of confiding in his sister all of his innermost thoughts and feelings. The letter amounts to a long (pp. 223-249), first person narration of two days of rioting in Sulaco when the Monterists gained control and the deposed dictator-president fled in fear of his life. By using Decoud's point of view, Conrad provides an entirely fresh and effective focus for the events: Decoud comments freely upon the occurrences and sees them through the sensitivity of the brilliant and witty intellectual, probing cleanly into central issues, but hiding his obvious idealism by a superficial and affected cynicism. His position is also furthered by the narrative.

The letter also introduces some interesting time intervals. Decoud is writing from the Viola's inn on the evening of the

second day of rioting, and he dramatizes, in the first person, several events which happened during those preceding hours. There is a leap in time from the close of Chapter Six to the actual time of Decoud's writing, partially filled in by his narration in the letter. There are interruptions in the letter, as Decoud pauses to smoke or to speak to the Viola daughters, which remind the reader of the time he is writing: (pp. 226, 229-30, 231-32, 244). The interruptions also serve to move the story forward slowly in the narrative present; there are in effect two streams of time moving simultaneously. At the close of the letter (p. 249), Nostromo enters the room to announce that he has brought Dr. Monygham for the dying Signora Teresa, who is elsewhere in the inn. This is, incidentally, Nostromo's first direct appearance in the main narrative, although he moves through Decoud's letter and is alluded to in the earlier conversations at frequent intervals.

The pace of the narrative quickens as Decoud and Nostromo leave the inn and set out into the darkness of the gulf with the lighter full of silver (p. 260). Now that we are with the man of action and into direct external events, the focus is sharp and clear, the movement single and direct to the conclusion of the section (p. 304). As the lighter moves out into the thick darkness the tension of the two aboard is in direct contrast to the tedious and futile conversations in the Casa Gould. Nearly all of the action is scenic, switching points of view as the setting changes. There are a few awkward transitions which seem artificial, such as this shift from Decoud's point of view to the author to Sotillo:

"Sotillo, as Nostromo had surmised, was in command on board the transport" (p. 284). Considering the complex series of events from the departure until Nostromo's sinking of the lighter, the narrative is handled with remarkable clarity and simplicity.

The final section of the novel returns to the inversions and "digressive" nature of the first. The opening is again panoramic, the omniscient author viewing from a distance the group of Europeans in Sulaco. The time goes back to events of the previous section: "Directly the cargo boat had slipped away from the wharf and got lost in the darkness of the harbour the Europeans of Sulaco separated, to prepare for the coming of the Monterist régime, which was approaching Sulaco from the mountains, as well as from the sea" (p. 307). The direct narrative does not return to Nostromo and his arrival on shore after sinking the lighter for over a hundred pages (p. 411). In these pages there is a variety of times and focuses, centering mainly on the town and the Europeans. This interval, which sets up a new narrative present, is important enough for detailed examination.

After the opening sentence, Chapter One of "The Light-house" returns to the Albergo D'Italia Una and the group--the center is Dr. Monygham--present there; the time is just after Nostromo and Decoud's departure. There is a flashback filling in the background of Dr. Monygham and his sufferings under Guzman Bento, which weaves in and out of the scene at the inn. The embittered and crippled Englishman converses with the engineer-in-chief of the railroad and Charles

Gould, displaying more penetration into the real essence of the political struggles than anyone else in the novel. Chapter Two moves chronologically to the stupid but simple and honest Captain Mitchell.

Chapter One has closed with the engineer's question, "I wonder if Sotillo really means to turn up here." (p. 322), and Chapter Two picks up at this point: "Captain Mitchell, pacing the wharf, was asking himself the same question" (p. 323). There is then a transition into one of Mitchell's narratives, apparently told much later but continuing the chronology: "He used to confess afterwards . . ." (p. 323). Although the narrative is short (three pages), it is important because as well as moving the main narrative along, it prepares the way for the Captain's later, more significant narrative. The language and opinions are wholly consistent with Mitchell's unimaginative, prosaic mind ("We have been infested here with mosquitoes before the late improvements; a peculiar harbour brand, sir, renowned for its ferocity" (p. 325)) and the section is skilfully contrasted with the brilliant perceptivity of Decoud's letter.

The transition back to omniscient author is not as smooth as could be wished: "In this Captain Mitchell was right" (p. 326). The main narrative then continues with Sotillo's landing and his capture of Mitchell, shown primarily through Selective Omniscience and in several dramatized scenes. The chapter closes with Dr. Monygham, who has also been captured by Sotillo, explaining to Mitchell his actions previous to that time. Chapter Three opens with a brief dramatic

projection of the events which Monygham had been telling Mitchell about at the close of the preceding chapter, a switch from first person to third, and the narrative then returns to the narrative present.

From this point on until the reappearance of Nostromo, the novel continues with the happenings in Sulaco while Nostromo and Decoud are escaping with the treasure. There are many switches in pace, setting, and point of view, jumping from place to place, character to character, until the whole situation is completely filled in and the original chronology restored (p. 413). The "digressive" method is much in evidence, but, as before, it enables Conrad to control and follow the many currents he has set up. There is in the midst of these pages a curious parenthetical remark, apparently directly from the author, which bears no structural relationship to the novel because its source is not explained. The aside occurs in the middle of a section concerned with the progress of the Sulaco aristocrats after the riots and refers to an official state letter: "In that letter Decoud's idea of the new Occidental State (whose flourishing and stable condition is a matter of common knowledge now) was for the first time made public and used as an argument" (p. 354). During these pages the time advances to the point where Pedro Montero is in control of the town and Sotillo and his troops encamped at the harbor. Montero's arrival is announced by the great ringing of bells by the mob in Sulaco (p. 384).

We return to Nostromo at the close of Chapter Seven; he has swum ashore after sinking the lighter and we see him as

he awakens from a fourteen hour sleep at the point he came ashore from his swim. For ten pages Conrad goes into Nostromo's mind at a greater depth and with a closer focus than he has previously with any other character, but the wavering and diffuse analysis of the earlier novels is avoided by a highly effective series of references and points of departure. Each time Nostromo ponders his fate, the train of thought has been suggested to him by some external perception: the vulture suggests death and Signora Teresa (p. 413); the empty fort, the barrenness of his own position (p. 414); the darkness of the sky, his poverty (p. 415); the shriek of the owl, calamity and death (p. 418); and the barking of dogs, the warmth of the sand under his feet, and two lighted windows function in this same way. Conrad maintains a consistent position throughout the analysis and yet graphically presents Nostromo's internal states of mind.

The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores is followed as he moves to the Custom House, with a direct scenic focus, and the narrative stays with him until Chapter Nine, when Sotillo's point of view takes control, and we move back into a later time to pick up Sotillo's actions after his arrival. Some simultaneity is indicated, for Sotillo is disturbed by the ringing of bells, the same which announced Montero's arrival (p. 440). From Chapter Ten on until its close, the novel utilizes a complex pattern of time shifts.

Mitchell, the chronicler of "great" historical events, enters in Chapter Ten to summarize, several years later, much of what happened after the disastrous riots. The narrative

is not long (pp. 473-89), but it ties up a great many loose ends left over from the close of the direct narrative in Chapter Nine. The time at which Mitchell is speaking is set by the opening paragraph of the chapter. It is Mitchell's declining years in public service, some years after the riots; the Occidental Republic has been established and Sulaco is a thriving city, peaceful and calm. The Captain is speaking, acting as a self-appointed guide and historian as he habitually does, to an anonymous traveler who is passing through Sulaco and is only vaguely aware of and interested in the events which have occurred there. The order of the narrative is like that of a travelogue; Mitchell points out places of interest to his passenger and tells of events connected with each place.

The sudden introduction of the loquacious Mitchell would seem, upon first examination, a break in narrative at precisely the point at which the reader is most involved in it. In the chapters preceding this the narrative has been followed closely; it is suddenly dropped, a great leap in time made, and the significant climaxes related in summary by an unperceptive, rambling old man. But this is only a momentary feeling, because what is gained from the device is considerably greater than what is lost. The important resolutions and climaxes are dramatized later, those which have a real bearing on the meaning of the novel. By placing the summary in Mitchell's person, Conrad is able to heighten the irony which underlies the whole pattern of the novel. Mitchell is a "double focus" and his audience, the bored passenger, strengthens the irony even further. The method is an expansion of that used to close

An Outcast of the Islands: the alien traveler-listener who has no real sympathies or interest in the events being told to him by an old, sentimental and bumbling narrator. Technically the device provides a great advantage also, because many events and characters which are unimportant in terms of theme but still need to be accounted for are summarized in a short space. The important occurrences which are later dramatized are only hinted at in Mitchell's guided tour of Sulaco; for example, what happened on the Great Isabel after Nostromo left Decoud with the treasure.

Mitchell's narrative closes and Conrad quickly switches to Nostromo at the time he is returning with General Barrios-- a considerable leap backwards in time; he is bringing the saviour of Sulaco after the "famous ride" alluded to by Mitchell. The time would fall in the interval skipped between the close of Chapter Nine and the narrative in Chapter Ten. The switch is rather abrupt: "Nostromo had, indeed, found the lighter's boat He was then on the bridge of the first of Barrios's transports, and within an hour's steaming from Sulaco" (p. 490). This time progression is followed until Nostromo reaches the Great Isabel, after leaping from the transport, and surmises that Decoud has killed himself. With another rather abrupt switch, the narrative goes back to Decoud on the island after Nostromo has left him. The transition is handled a little more smoothly. Nostromo wonders what actually did happen to Decoud.

"But then, I cannot know," he pronounced, distinctly, and remained silent and staring for hours.

He could not know. Nobody was to know.
 As might have been supposed, the end of Don
 Martin Decoud never became a subject of specu-
 lation for any one except Nostromo (p 496).

Conrad then proceeds to show what really did happen to the Parisian journalist. The progression of time for Decoud on the island is done quite simply: "At the end of his first day . . ." (496); "On the tenth day . . ." (p. 498); (a jump backwards) "It was on the third day . . ." (p. 500). At the close of the chapter, the narrative returns to Nostromo where it left him on the island pondering Decoud's fate.

Another considerable interval is skipped in Chapter Eleven: Captain Mitchell has retired and returned to England, Sulaco is a metropolis, still growing with European wealth, the Occidental Republic is solidly established (although faint mutterings of another revolution are heard), and all of the principals have aged a number of years. From here until the close of the novel the events are all chronological. The narrative alternates between the group at the Casa Gould and the Violas and Nostromo, setting finally upon the Capataz in the two closing chapters. The return to Nostromo is neatly fitted into the structure: Chapter Ten, where Nostromo has last appeared directly, closes as he says, "'I must grow rich very slowly'" (p. 503), and Chapter Twelve, where he returns, opens, "Nostromo had been growing rich very slowly" (p. 523).

The closing paragraphs of the novel are an intensely effective climax to the great currents and passions which it has explored. Linda, who has loved the magnificent Capataz,

is told of his death and from her position on the rail of the lighthouse, sends a grief stricken scream into the darkness of the night:

"Never! Gian' Battista!"

Dr. Monygham, pulling around in the police-galley, heard the name pass over his head. It was another of Nostromo's triumphs, the greatest, the most enviable, the most sinister of all. In that true cry of undying passion that seemed to ring aloud from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Carreadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love (p. 566).

One of the most evident conclusions to be drawn from this analysis is that so much is left out of it; that it is, as Lubbock has said, so impossible to hold within our minds such a vast and complex structure of human relationships; and a bare list of devices is at best just mechanical. Ignored is tone, which is a very vital element in Nostromo because Conrad's attitudes toward his subject are the real meaning in the novel. Also neglected are the symbols, the echoes, and the numerous little themes which give the novel its counterpoint-like form. And it should not be assumed because Nostromo has such a varied maze of time, character and event, that it is necessarily a great novel; complexity in itself is no virtue in narrative fiction. However, most of Conrad's commentators agree that Nostromo is his greatest achievement, and even that "a good case could be made out for considering it the greatest novel in English of this century."⁵⁵ Much

⁵⁵Walter Allen, The English Novel, p. 299.

of this admiration centers on the fact that it is "one of the most complex and closely-constructed novels in the language."⁵⁶

The real structural accomplishment of Nostromo is that so much is presented in the novel, and presented so fully and so clearly. Lord Jim and Chance have very intricate structures also, but neither cuts nearly so wide a swath as does Nostromo. They are both essentially novels of depth--of deep penetration into single or a few characters; whereas Nostromo reveals much about a lot of characters; it has both depth and more breadth than almost any other modern novel--and breadth in the sense that War and Peace is broad and panoramic. Conrad presents this whole history of a country, a microcosm of modern human conflicts, not in episodic segments, like for example U.S.A., but in a balanced, skilfully built whole.

Guerard has described the structure "as though a flashlight were playing fitfully and at random in a dark room, full of still objects and moving people, like forces of history."⁵⁷ The figure is visually apt, but the light by no means plays "at random," for its focus is always carefully directed upon those subjects which are most significant when they are most significant. The seemingly aimless digressions of Conrad in the novel are all part of his method, and it is a conscious way of viewing the material of a novel. The same point can be made of his novels generally--and the whole concept of form

⁵⁶Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Philadelphia: Dufour and Saifer, 1952), p. 46.

⁵⁷Joseph Conrad, p. 26.

held by the Impressionists. In Nostromo, plot (or order of events) is subservient to theme; exposition (background) and narrative present (foreground) are equally important; time is subordinate to perception.

This analysis has attempted to show that Conrad linked together all of this huge segment of history by a principle more important, to him, than the conventional chronological form. A great use is made of juxtaposition of scene for irony, of association by idea and character instead of time, of meaning through arrangement and focus instead of direct comment. No one single character or narrator could know all of Nostromo, yet all of it is vital to this intricate edifice of ideals and attitudes. It is necessary that Conrad convince us of the geographical reality of this mythical, yet very real, country, because such a huge structure must have a solid basis of reality. In conclusion, Nostromo illustrates the most important informing principle in all of Conrad's structural methods, that the real meaning of a novel comes as much from the way it is presented to the reader as it does through what is brought to him.

CHAPTER V

INFLUENCES

The critical process of tracing influences has many pitfalls. It is difficult to say with real accuracy that any given novelist is working wholly or even in part under the influence of another because the influence may not be conscious, and the restricted nature of the novel form and the language in which it is written impose such limitations on the writer that within a certain area it is impossible to avoid "influence," which is often simply the following of the traditions of the genre or the temper of the age. The problem of determining just what is to constitute an influence is also central. It is questionable whether it can be seen in terms of subject--as is so often done--because an examination of the history of the novel will show that subject is secondary to what the novelist has done in treating it. There is little validity in saying that Cooper and Marryat influenced Conrad because they wrote about the sea; or that Conrad influenced Masfield for the same reason; or that Somerset Maugham is a follower of Conrad because both use South Seas settings. Conrad's choice of subjects and settings is as varied as any novelist's in English literature, and he was not, in any real sense, an historian of the British Merchant Marine or a painter of exotic Malayasian landscapes.

There is little logical progression in subjects and settings which include the slums of London, revolution in South America, Russia and Geneva, the French Mediterranean coast and the Napoleonic wars, and Spain and the Carlist intrigues. It would hardly be useful to say that any novelist was influenced by Conrad's choice of subject alone.

Rather than subject or setting, the more valid way of seeing the effect of a novelist upon other novelists is through his methods, or his attitude toward methods as shown in his productions; it is here that we can see most clearly what distinguishes one novelist's work from that of another. Once we have seen the differences and similarities, it is possible to group writers into categories according to their views of technique. If several novelists seem to share a common or similar attitude toward the ways in which a subject should be treated and the kinds of meaning which a novel should present, then we can establish a tradition. The process is at best mechanical and oversimplified, but unfortunately necessary, because it is one of the ways in which the patterns of literary history are given significance. Be setting up streams, or traditions, in the history of the novel, "influence" tracing can have a useful function.

In the first chapter of this study there was an attempt to show the beginning of such a tradition in the English novel, those writers who have been termed the Impressionists. There are enough parallels in the novels produced by this group, or in their statements outside their novels, to demonstrate that there was a core of influence operating upon

all of them. Conrad was certainly affected by this influence.

There are many similarities in style between Conrad and Crane. The Nigger of the "Narcissus" is greatly indebted to The Red Badge of Courage for its whole structural concentration upon a group instead of individuals, and its color symbolism as well. In addition to those already mentioned earlier, Conrad's novel is filled with Crane-like anthropomorphic images: "Outside the night moaned and sobbed to the accompaniment of a continuous loud tremor as of innumerable drums beating far off" (p. 54); "A sun enormous, unclouded and red, declining low as if bending down to look into their faces" (p. 74); ". . . the big seas began to roll across the crimson disc" (p. 75). The view of the mysterious, malignant effect of James Wait upon the crew has much of the unreality of Crane's treatment of nature, abstract, brutal, hovering on the edge of the supernatural. These are just scattered examples, but there are many other illustrations in Conrad's novels of his great admiration for Stephen Crane.

The exact influence of Ford upon Conrad would be a valuable study in itself, but there can be little doubt that many of Conrad's most effective techniques were learned from Ford and vice versa. Perhaps the best evidence for this is to consider those novels written after and during Conrad's collaboration with Ford (1898-1909). Among those are certainly Conrad's greatest technical accomplishments--Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, Chance, Victory. Unquestionably there is considerable development in Conrad's technical skill from the inferior early novels

to those written after his association with Ford--the development goes even further in Ford's own novels.

It is difficult to be as concrete with the effect of Hudson and James upon Conrad. Hudson was not so important, in a real sense, as a novelist, as he was as a prose stylist. His effect upon Conrad was in part that of an ideal rather than a model. James' technical experiments were in a different direction from Conrad's, that of a closer internal analysis, but the impetus was much the same: the desire to break away from traditional structures and limitations of focus.

Before establishing the continuity of this tradition, it is necessary to expand upon its nature at greater length. The view of the novel as it is seen by this stream of English novelists does not place great emphasis upon character, character development, or events alone, in the way that, for example, Dickens, Eliot, or Thackeray does. This does not mean that character is neglected--obviously a novel is about people and cannot ignore their peculiar differentiations--but that this aspect is subservient to a greater one. Instead the novelist makes an attempt, through shifts in time, a richness of verbal images, symbols, and a variety of focuses, to place his characters and events into a relationship with universal spiritual and moral laws. The great intensity of technical experiment illustrates the great complexity of human experience; the full truth in a novel cannot be known until the whole is completed. This breaking up of traditional patterns is not used for superficial dramatic effects or

suspense for its own sake; it is an accurate reflection of the great richness of meaning in human experience and the only way to reach this great richness, to show its relationship to fundamental human truths.

The novel tries (with varying success), from this standpoint, to achieve the massive complexity of Shakespearean drama and the subtlety of lyric poetry; the structure and multiplicity of views provide the many levels of meaning. Conrad, most specifically, does not concentrate upon internal psychology and the view his characters impose upon events, but upon the way in which the events react upon the characters. These characters do not find their fate wholly determined by the force of outside events, as is the case with those in the naturalistic-sociological novel; they work out their fates within a framework of unchangeable values, but they have alternatives to choose from in the framework.

Technical experimentation with form is a natural result of the novelist's desire to see more deeply into the nature of his experience. The great wealth of time shifts, symbolism, points of view, and stylistic twists in the modern novel are necessary means of expanding meaning. The juxtaposition of time and scene can provide ironies, parallels and contrasts; closer adherence to a limited point of view and the exclusion of a mechanical author place the source of meaning where it is most effectively placed, upon implication and suggestion, the real force of much great art. It is inevitable that with this emphasis upon technique that more and more obstacles are created for the reader of the modern novel. The point

at which complexity ceases to have meaning and becomes a game for its own sake is a difficult one to establish and the clarification of this is one of the necessary responsibilities of the contemporary critic. But it should not be forgotten that the desire of the tradition which Conrad did so much to introduce into the English novel was not necessarily ease of reading, but depth of vision.¹ Experimentation is not the exclusive property of the modern tradition, of course; it is the factor that has kept the English novel alive since its beginnings, but it is this tradition which has most clearly recognized the great potentialities of technique.

In narrowing the tradition down into specific writers there is the usual risk of making literary history into personal prejudice, but this is a risk which must be taken if the categorization of the novel into definitive tendencies and groups is to be specific. There are in the group of what we call somewhat loosely the "modern novel" several writers; exclusive of the Impressionists, who seem to share a common view towards the necessity of technical experimentation: F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf.² These at least are the major ones, allowing of course for the wide

¹It is also true, however, that, as Ford constantly repeats (Joseph Conrad, p. 173), the importance of any technique was its final effect upon the reader.

²To this list (which is not meant to be rigidly exclusive) might be added "minor" contemporary novelists like Robert Penn Warren, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Caroline Gordon, Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, and William Sansom; and short story writers like Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter.

divergencies in individual style, structure, and theme. As a matter of fact, one definite characteristic of all of these novelists is the highly individual methods each uses. But all do agree upon the basic tenet of the tradition, that the novel should reach some of the most universal truths of human experience and that the way of doing so is through exploration of technical methods. All of these novelists show some influence--as it has been defined here--of Conrad's novels. Perhaps the best evidence that these writers share a core of attitude is to contrast them with the other dominant streams in the twentieth century novel.

Although all of these novelists have protested contemporary social conditions and criticized social institutions, they do not concentrate upon this to the exclusion of other themes as do the realists and naturalists: Theodore Dreiser, James T. Farrell, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, and Erskine Caldwell. These novelists are not primarily interested in the expression of current political beliefs or philosophical conflicts as are those writers who have made the "novel of ideas" such a force in contemporary fiction: Andre Gide, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann, and Arthur Koestler. All of the novelists have attempted satire briefly, but none is a satirist in the same sense as Evelyn Waugh, Sinclair Lewis, and George Orwell.³ The novelists outside the tradition have ventured

³Another group, the "Cult of the Simple," or "Boys in the Backroom," has arisen, probably from Hemingway's influence. Dealing with violence in the manner of the "tough guy" and verbal understatement, such novelists as John O'Hara, Raymond Chandler, Horace McCoy, James M. Cain, Dashiell Hammett have been very influential abroad and in popular fiction in this country, but their relation to the tradition is only very indirect.

experiments in technique, some with much success--Gide, Huxley, Dos Passos, for example--but, to use hair-splitting differences, their artistic intentions were in a different direction. The group of writers here posited as a tradition may or may not be the "Great Tradition" of the English novel, but they are most definitely in those directions set up by the Impressionists.

It is true that in this group the influence of Conrad is somewhat faint at times. James Joyce, certainly a writer who has had much impact on the modern novel, is basically a different writer from Conrad. Even though Ford claims that "Mr. Joyce descends from Mr. James in his perception of minute embarrassments and related frames of mind, and he has carried Mr. Conrad's early researches after ramified Form almost as far as they can go,"⁴ Joyce's relationship to this group comes by virtue of his desire to experiment and break into new areas of technique, rather than from any direct influence of any single novelist. The great uses to which he bends time and language are, at least in their intention, akin to the Impressionists. As Harry Levin points out, curiously the three greatest influences upon the modern English novel are the American, James; the Pole, Conrad; and the Irishman, Joyce.⁵

In the discussion in Chapter I, it was shown that Virginia Woolf's very important views of the English novel establish

⁴Thus to Revisit, p. 65.

⁵James Joyce: A Critical Introduction (Norfolk: New Directions, 1941), p. 215.

her as a key member of the tradition. The careful, minute internal analysis, the great beauty of verbal images, and the importance of time expansion and contraction are in spirit part of the same search for new levels of meaning we have seen in Conrad. Like Joyce, she strives for greater psychological realism, the shades and subtleties of the personal, inner world of her characters; whereas Conrad's view was of his characters in relation to universal values, of a more cosmic and transcendent meaning. But both realized that the way to their visions was through technical experiment.⁶

The connection between Conrad and Hemingway may also seem to be quite far-fetched, for the two are almost two sides of a coin. Conrad's romanticism, his affirmation, are only indirectly present in Hemingway's novels. But Hemingway probably more than any other modern novelist of stature has realized the possibilities of "rendering" as Ford saw the device. Very basic in Hemingway's novels is his strong emphasis upon the particular, and much of his meaning comes through implication and suggestion. The real differences lie in his themes and philosophical views, or lack of them; his methods come from the same essential source as Conrad's.

F. Scott Fitzgerald expresses admiration for Conrad several times in his letters and notebooks.⁷ In the notes for his last novel, he makes an interesting comment about his projected treatment of the material which illustrates

⁶There are many similarities in method in Virginia Woolf's first novel The Voyage Out (1915) and "Heart of Darkness" (1902).

⁷The Crack-Up, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions, 1945).

his complete understanding of the reason for Conrad's narrators. Fitzgerald wishes to treat the love affair in the novel as it "comes through to Cecilia."

That is to say by making Cecilia, at the moment of her telling the story, an intelligent and observant woman, I shall grant myself the privilege, as Conrad did, of letting her imagine the actions of her characters. Thus, I hope to get the verisimilitude of a first person narrative, combined with a Godlike knowledge of all events that happen to my characters.⁸

In a recent article, R. W. Stallman makes some rather extravagant claims about Conrad's influence on Fitzgerald: "What he learned from Conrad includes not only the perplexed narrator and turns of phrasing . . . --in fact, the craft of the novel, including a theory of its construction."⁹ These claims are not particularly well substantiated, but Stallman does introduce some significant factors about Conrad's effect on Fitzgerald. Certainly Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway owes much to Marlow; he is ironic, self-deprecatory, intelligent and sensitive--in short, an ideal narrator. He is a focus and a receptacle of confessions who frames the story and is also part of it, an "I" Witness, and his personality is always very evident in what he tells. Stallman finds a great many common symbols and stylistic traits in the two novelists which can come from their mutual preoccupation with intense

⁸The Last Tycoon: An Unfinished Novel, together with The Great Gatsby, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 139-40.

⁹"Conrad and The Great Gatsby," Twentieth Century Literature, I (April, 1955), 5.

moral problems more easily than they can from any attempt on Fitzgerald's part to imitate Conrad's methods. Of greater significance are Fitzgerald's time inversions, fluctuating points of view, and his use of narrators. One of the most interesting examples of the latter is the close of The Great Gatsby. The entire novel has been narrated by Nick Carraway, in the first person, until the last sentence, when Fitzgerald switches to first person plural: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."¹⁰ The image as well as the merging of the narrator into a universalized mankind is the reverse of the technique in The Nigger of the "Narcissus," in which the narrator passes through a universalized experience to become an individual and singular, but the method is the same.

William Faulkner has never been prone to make public statements about his craft outside his novels, and the best evidence for any influences which have shaped his techniques is in his novels. It is fitting that the most experimental of contemporary writers should expand those new horizons first glimpsed by Conrad. As early as 1936, before Faulkner had gained anything like his present stature, Crankshaw pointed out that his suspended time, simultaneity, and counterpoint qualities were very much like those of Conrad.¹¹ Guerard also finds many Conradian echoes in Faulkner's novels, although he is more concerned with thematic similarities.¹²

¹⁰. . . The Great Gatsby, p. 301.

¹¹ Crankshaw, p. 176.

¹² Joseph Conrad, pp. 47, 57.

Because Faulkner too is a restless experimenter, there are the expected parallels in method with Conrad, so much so that only high spots can be touched upon in this review. Faulkner's most intricately structured novel is probably Absalom, Absalom!, which employs as varied a time scheme and focus as Nostromo. He has, in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, explored the technical possibilities of Selective Omniscience more fully than any novelist excepting James Joyce. The mythical Yoknapatawpha County of his creation is a realistic segment of history like Conrad's Costaguana, and it is used for the same purpose as Conrad's, a microcosm of modern man. The narrator device is common in Faulkner's novels and short stories; sometimes the narrator is not literally present in his work--as in The Old Man--but his presence is felt by the reader because of the controlled flow of the narrative, much like the external impersonality of Nostromo and The Secret Agent. Robert Penn Warren has spoken of Faulkner's "spiral method which takes the reader over and over the same event from a different altitude, as it were, and a different angle."¹³ The method is basically the same as Conrad's working "forwards and backwards" over an event and characters. Both novelists view a world with much violence (a factor sometimes ignored by Conrad's critics, who see it just as melodrama) and share a like moral view.

It is interesting, although not particularly valid as evidence of influence, to examine two statements made by the novelists outside their novels. The phrasing, imagery,

¹³"William Faulkner," Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 142.

sentence flow, and basic ideas are remarkably similar; the second is almost a continuation of the first. This is from Conrad's essay on Henry James in his Notes on Life & Letters:

When the last aqueduct shall have crumbled to pieces, the last airship fallen to the ground, the last blade of grass have died upon a dying earth, man, indomitable by his training in resistance to misery and pain, shall set this undiminished light of his eyes against the feeble glow of the sun

For my own part, from a short and cursory acquaintance with my kind, I am inclined to think that the last utterance will formulate, strange as it may appear, some hope now to us utterly inconceivable (pp. 13-14).

The second is from Faulkner's famous Nobel Prize speech:

It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound; that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.¹⁴

In discussing Graham Greene, it is necessary to draw a distinction, as he does, between his "entertainments," those thrillers which have given him his wide popular reputation, and his novels, although the line is sometimes quite thin. Even though Greene has expressed a preference for Ford Madox Ford, in his novels he illustrates many literary affinities with Conrad. The most important of these is, in a very formal sense, not technique, but theme: his choice of a hero, the

¹⁴"Nobel Prize Award Speech," Saturday Review Reader (New York: Bantam Books, 1951), p. 68.

hunted man who faces complex moral decisions in his exile. Morton Zabel has traced the lineage of this figure to Heyst, Lord Jim, and Razumov;¹⁵ and to this might be added Almayer, James Wait, or even Nostromo, Conrad's most typical "heroes." Greene's protagonist--like Pinky in Brighton Rock, the priest in The Labyrinthine Ways, Drover in It's a Battlefield, Scobie in The Heart of The Matter--is an individual, lonely and betrayed by his world, who seeks some moral identity, in much the same way that Jim, Heyst, and Razumov do; he is one of the most familiar figures in the modern novel. Although setting in itself is not substantial evidence of influence, there are enough parallels in Greene and Conrad for interesting conjectures. Like Conrad, Greene has set novels in Africa (The Heart of The Matter), Latin America (The Labyrinthine Ways), and London slums (It's a Battlefield).

One of the most interesting proofs that Greene is very much in the Conrad tradition is his debt to The Secret Agent, which Zabel calls a "parent classic"¹⁶ in the field of the thriller Greene has done so much to exploit. The atmosphere of intrigue, frustration and despair of Conrad's novel is strong in all of Greene's work, but the one novel most like The Secret Agent, in theme and technique, is It's a Battlefield. The latter novel grows around a convict who is accused of a political crime (like Conrad's Michaelis and Verloc), and an

¹⁵"Graham Greene," Forms of Modern Fiction, p. 291.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 292.

assistant commissioner of police who investigates it. There are also, in Greene's novel, an elder statesman and his secretary ("Toodles"), some tawdry revolutionists, a police inspector (Crosse), and an innocent wife caught in the meshes of political crime. The most remarkable resemblance in characterization is in the two assistant commissioners of police: both are identified only as "the Assistant Commissioner"; both are honest, patient men of integrity; both have colonial backgrounds, accustomed to dealing with simple native affairs of crime and punishment, but have been forced into a maelstrom of urban violence and political crime; despite the fact that both are suspected by their inferior, veteran officers of lacking experience in police methods, they find a direct path through the violence of civilization by uncompromising devotion to their single standards of truth.

Greene did not, however, rewrite The Secret Agent; he explored different moral complexities involved in a similar situation. His general method in It's a Battlefield, developed more fully in later novels, is like that of Nostromo and The Secret Agent. The novel moves through several dramatic scenes; internal analysis is held to a minimum and there are frequent time shifts. In all of his novels Greene utilizes Conrad's careful building of atmosphere through impressionistic description, with perhaps a more careful delineation of concrete detail than Conrad, but the physical atmosphere in his novels, like those of Conrad's, is as important as the moral.

However, all of these examples of specific influences can be open to question because similarities can be so easily

twisted to fit desired conclusions. Even so, if these are only partially valid there is surely reason for seeing that Conrad's experimental methods have had a profound and far-reaching effect on contemporary fiction. Moving from the specific to the general, it is possible to see even a more significant effect, or at least development, his methods have had on the whole esthetic direction of modern literature.

In an essay which has received a good deal of attention among contemporary critics, Joseph Frank posits a theory of form in literature which is in complete contrast to the traditional view of the subject. The traditional definition of form in literature, following Lessing's Laokoon, is that it communicates through language and therefore must be based on some form of narrative sequence. In modern literature, says Frank, this concept has undergone much evolution, the most important being a movement towards spatial form as contrasted with chronological form. "This means that the reader is intended to apprehend their [modern writers'] work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence."¹⁷

Frank places the inception of this evolution with the imagist movement, which roughly coincides with Conrad's declining years (1914-1924). The contribution of this group comes from their view of an image; Pound's definition is quoted by Frank: "An image is that which presents an

¹⁷Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Critiques and Essays in Criticism, ed. Robert Wooster Stallman (New York: The Ronald Press, 1949), p. 318.

intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."¹⁸ Pound's Cantos and Eliot's The Wasteland are cited as examples of structures in which narrative is broken into fragments and meaning does not depend upon temporal relationships. For the novel, Frank gives Flaubert's county fair scene in Madame Bovary as an example of simultaneous levels of time; Flaubert breaks up sequence by dissolving from time level to time level, and "attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the limited time-area."¹⁹ The latter description accurately fits the rationale given in Chapter IV of this study for Conrad's time inversions--although Frank at no point makes a reference to Conrad.

Frank believes that the clearest example of spatial form in the contemporary novel is Ulysses, wherein Joyce applies the method on a gigantic scale. Joyce's intention is "to give the reader a picture of Dublin seen as a whole"²⁰ In Ulysses "a knowledge of the whole is essential to an understanding of any part."²¹ Ford Madox Ford's concept of the function of the novel, quoted earlier, is a very close parallel.

If Frank's theory of spatial form is a valid description of trends in modern literature, and it does certainly seem to

¹⁸Ibid., p. 319.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 322.

²⁰Ibid., p. 323.

²¹Ibid., p. 325.

offer a logical explanation of structural complexities, then it should be obvious that Conrad's methods have had a great deal to do with the direction of all of modern literature as well as the modern novel. He was, of course, not solely responsible for such an important trend--he may have been nothing more than a contemporary actualization of ideas already strong in the period--but the function of time, as Frank sees it, is only an inevitable development of Conrad's inversions and his simultaneity, his recognition that association and reaction are the real determinants of structure, rather than temporal relationship. From Flaubert to Conrad and the Impressionists, to Joyce and then to Faulkner, there is a logically developing tradition of form.

In the great body of work created by this novelist who was alien in so many ways to the English tradition, there can be found some of the greatest technical achievements in the English novel. Disregarding any influences he may have had, and viewing his work in isolation from any tradition or literary coterie, there are not many novelists in the relatively short history of the form who experimented so thoroughly or who achieved so much. Through his expansions of the form, he gave a new view of human experience, one with more depth and meaning than had hitherto been possible in the novel; and this is the final criterion for judging any literary technique.

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EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: "Method and Form in the Novels of Joseph Conrad"

Approved:

W M Caffee
Major Professor and Chairman

Richard J. Russell
Dean of the Graduate School

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Date of Examination:

3 May 1956